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CREDITS

SOME BEYOND REALITY
COMICS INTERVIEW

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT
editor/publisher

conceived by
JIM SALICRUP
editorial and design consultant

DARREL L BOATZ
associate editor

STEPHEN BISSETTE
JEFF GELB
RICK NORWOOD
BRIAN TALLEY
contributing editors

M KAY McGONNELL
operations manager

D HAMBONE
art & tone director

DON MARKSTEIN
typographer

SALLY GARLAND
T GORTEL
CAROLYN YOUNG
production

TAMMY BROWN
FLINT DILLE
SUSAN GLIMCHER
CAROL KALISH
DANA LAUFER
JUSTIN McCORMACK
ED O'NEAL
BOB SCHRECK
special thanks

MARTIN W HERZOG
canadian correspondent

SGT PEEPER
robodog

GRAND SLAM
robohorse

SPECIAL EDITION
robohorse 2

J R MATHER
international marketing director

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cover contributed by:
FRANK MILLER
art
BRIAN STELFREEZE
colors

UP FRONT

It seems I'm always seeing some story — most recently on PBS — about how the rich are getting richer and the poor will only get poorer and woe to us all, the way the world is going.

There is an arrogance of ignorance and a failure of reason at work in this type of argument. The unspoken assumption is that "the establishment" is somehow responsible for keeping us down. There are no opportunities. Someone else's good fortune is our misfortune. It's a zero-sum game. McDonald's is an impregnable franchise. So is Marvel Comics. You get the idea. It's impossible to compete. Envy and resentment are the only options.

But one man created the multinational McDonald's monster a mere three decades ago — he certainly didn't see the world that way. And Marvel only three decades ago was an also-ran, laughed at by the big boys.

The point is, you can always count on change — and opportunity . . . especially the kind you make for yourself. Comics is a prime example of the power of individual creativity. Alone in a room, an artist and/or writer puts thoughts on paper — and rises or falls on the result.

Not all that long ago, **Frank Miller** was a newcomer to the field. At the time, it was said superhero comics were dying. But Frank put Batman on national best-seller lists, and helped bring a newfound respectability to the field. Now **Miller's** scripted a major motion picture — and where he goes next is up to him.

Also not long ago, **Peter Laird** co-created TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, in part a parody of Frank's work — which is now a fabulous success story in comics, merchandising and, yes, movies.

So don't *dare* let anyone tell you it can't be done, that you don't stand a chance as an individual, that the success of others somehow diminishes your own.

—Dave K

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ROBOCOP 2

"I figured a movie titled ROBOCOP had to be dumb."

FRANK MILLER

His voice hasn't been exactly silent, but there has been a curious lack of new comics projects from Frank Miller of late. The reason for that is that he's been busy working, and the good news is that very soon he'll be back making headlines with some new and different comics — as well as his first movie. Jeff Gelb met with Frank over dinner and got the whole scoop . . .

JEFF GELB: *I assume that ROBOCOP has taken up the lion's share of your time for the past, how long, a couple years?*

FRANK MILLER: I've been at work on the movie for two years.

JEFF: *How did you actually get it? Was someone a fan of your work, did you push hard to get it, did you not push hard to get it?*

FRANK: Producer **Jon Davison** called me up and offered me the job. It was my comics that got his attention.

JEFF: *How did he know your stuff?*

FRANK: Probably from DARK KNIGHT. DARK KNIGHT got such *enormous* attention, and I think that **Davison** felt that it had the kind of tone and mix of adventure and political parody that he wanted in ROBOCOP 2.

JEFF: *Still, it was a stretch. I mean, of all of the people he could have chosen, that's really looking outside the window.*

FRANK: Yeah. I was surprised by the call, and intrigued.

JEFF: *Had you seen ROBOCOP before?*

FRANK: I didn't see it when it came out. I figured a movie with the title ROBOCOP had to be really dumb. *(Laughter.)* But friends urged me again and again to see it. I rented the videotape and *loved* it.

JEFF: *You actually didn't see it until it came out on video.*

FRANK: Right — that was about a week before Jon called me up.

JEFF: *It must be terribly ironic to view something and then become so closely attached to what happens to it. Did you find yourself, when you watched ROBOCOP, thinking about how you might have done things differently?*

FRANK: No, I really just *enjoyed* ROBOCOP. I found myself laughing again at some of the gags the next day. I really enjoyed the nice balance of Frankensteinian angst and the unintentional humor — intentional from the *writers'* point of view, but not from the characters'. I enjoyed the hell out of it. When Jon called I was still very excited about what I'd seen — it was a lucky coincidence. Ideas immediately started coming to me.

My first reaction formed the central theme that survived seven drafts. The unfortunate thing was that Jon and I

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"Coming in as a novice was the best thing for myself."

couldn't talk for so long because of the writers strike. But once the guild okayed the project, I really did hit the ground running with a *flood* of extravagant and absurd ideas.

JEFF: *He probably encouraged you to do that and then kind of pulled the reins in later.*

FRANK: Yeah. He's very encouraging. And he also has a very focused idea of what he wants out of ROBOCOP.

JEFF: *What does he want? Does he see, like JAMES BOND, eighteen films or —*

FRANK: I don't think Jon thinks of it *that* way at all. I'm mostly guessing here, but I think he didn't want to do ROBOCOP 2 unless there was a *different* way to do ROBOCOP, another movie that was worth making that featured the character. He has equated ROBOCOP with FRANKENSTEIN not only in dramatic terms but in terms of the FRANKENSTEIN run of movies where each time out it was a whole different take on the character, rather than being an ongoing adventure or epic, and also rather than being a series of tiresome remakes.

JEFF: *Were you at a point in your career where you wanted to do screenplays? Had you even given it any thought?*

FRANK: I hadn't really given it a *lot* of thought. It sounded like fun. It's hard to describe the last two years as *fun. (Laughter.)* But it was very good timing for me. I had just done DARK KNIGHT, it had hit real big, and I kind of needed something to put me back on my toes. Coming in as a novice into another field was the best thing I could have done for myself. *(Dinners served.)*

JEFF: *Different people approach situations differently — some people would have been totally frozen by the idea of following up ROBOCOP. Did you ever think you couldn't do this?*

FRANK: I was eager. It was, "This sounds like fun." It was really that simple. Understand, I don't really regard film as a form that is intrinsically superior to comics. I didn't feel that it was a "step up" professionally — and I still don't. But my creative life kind of needed a jolt like that right then, and I love movies. So, the first thing I did was watch twice as many movies as usual — I'm always watching movies anyway — and read all of the screenplays I could get my hands on.

I very soon wanted to write ROBOCOP 2. I felt I had a good story, good characters — and yeah, the idea of sitting in a theater and seeing my scenes and my words brought to vivid life was

Peter Weller as everyone's favorite future cop — from ROBOCOP II.

"The script is just words on paper and

irresistible.

Drawing comics, I would often think that it would be wonderful to make use of sound and continuous movement, and I would love to hear some of my words spoken rather than see them in balloons. So I was intrigued, excited — I don't remember being particularly frightened.

JEFF: *Now, did you say you went through seven drafts?*

FRANK: In total, yeah.

JEFF: *That's actually not that unusual in filmmaking, but how about a thumbnail sketch about why that process does take that many times, because obviously it's different from comics quite a bit.*

FRANK: *Very* different. It all has to do with how high the stakes are. They're going to spend $25 million on a movie. The studio, the producer, the director and the star are all *banking* on this thing with terrific consequence, and so tension is high. And at the earliest stages of development, the script is the only thing that exists, the only place for all that pressure to be applied. There isn't yet a cast, a production designer, a composer. Just words on paper and millions of dollars hanging in the balance. Believe me, my screenplay was scrutinized like no other piece of writing I've ever produced.

ROBOCOP 2 was also my very first screenplay. I was, in this field, a novice. Hollywood has a hard time respecting anything but itself, you know. I was an outsider, and had a lot to prove.

And there was much for me to learn about the form itself. As well as how much it would cost to bring a given scene to life. Very different than dreaming something up and drawing. **Kershner** in particular, bringing decades of experience to bear, he influenced the script in shape, intent, and detail. We argued a lot, I learned a lot, and the script got a whole lot better.

JEFF: *But you said that there was an obvious . . . what's the word — an obvious progression from the first script through the seventh, but you said even the seventh one bore a great relation to the first — is that right?*

FRANK: As a matter of fact the seventh one bore a *greater* relationship to the first than the ones in between.*(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Sometimes you have to go the long way around, eh?*

FRANK: Themes came and went, plotlines came and went — but the essential *heart* of the story remained Robocop's struggle for free will.

JEFF: *How did you feel about the input of that many creative types into your ideas? I assume it was your idea. I mean, Jon gave you more of a philosophy than a storyline, right?*

FRANK: Jon reacted to what I came up with, made suggestions. I came in with first a theme and then with a plotline, then to *another* plotline, then with *another. (Laughter.)* He was the sounding board, and through most of the development he was the *collaborator* in the sense that the producer has to be. He's somebody who has made a number of films, knows what can and can't be done, what costs too much, and has a good sense of what it was that worked in ROBOCOP that shouldn't be lost.

JEFF: *So, I assume that you were grateful for his input —*

FRANK: Yeah.

JEFF: *But at the same time — not just talking about Jon here — are there frustrations in working with that many creative types and trying to satisfy all of them?*

FRANK: Absolutely, it can drive you crazy. Because it's a *mix* of wonderful opportunity and a dangerous tendency towards committee thinking, from shying away from what has not been established as successful before. I'm happy that the most original character in the script survived as much as she has.

JEFF: *Who is that?*

FRANK: The character's name is Dr. Faxx. She is a psychologist who is the head of the Attitude Adjustment team at OCP, the corporation that made Robocop. She is the chief antagonist in the story. She is played by **Belinda Bauer,** who brought the character to life so *beautifully.* She really knocked me out.

That's just one example of the opportunities that presented themselves during filming. Here was my favorite character, the first one I'd created in my first draft — and she'd been reduced to not much more than a cliche across months of rewrites and the general insanity of actually making a movie. And there I was on the set with the perfect actress to play my favorite character. It was irresistible. Kersh and Jon agreed to keep Belinda for another week. I restructured much of the story, adding new scenes, at least tripling her part in size. That was certainly the biggest improvement of the script during shooting.

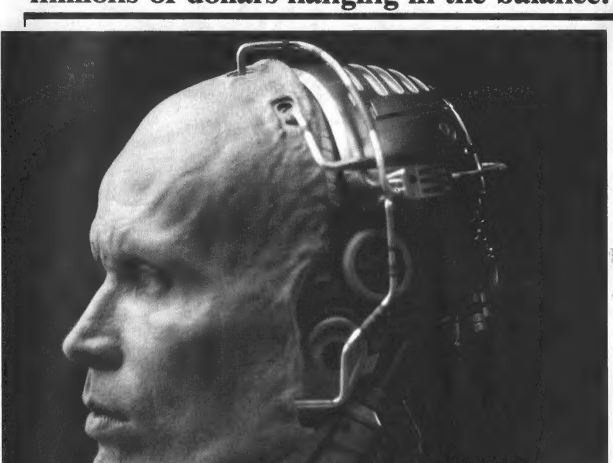
Another gold mine was **Peter Weller.** Very opinionated, very argumentative, and completely committed to his craft. He and Kersh and I arm-wrestled through scene after scene — even sometimes debating single words of dialogue while the crew stood waiting. I'm glad we did. **Weller** brought Robocop to life with an intensity and sincerity that made all the arguments seem like a small price to pay.

But to get back to your question, it can certainly drive you crazy having so many people *so* involved, with so much at stake. The advantage is that you also get the benefit of their expertise. An accomplished director with a great passion for his work —

JEFF: *Who is the director?*

FRANK: Irvin Kershner. And the production designer, **Peter Jamison,** who kept visualizing, making everything

millions of dollars hanging in the balance."



abstract concrete in the design of every scene. There's also **Phil Tippet** and **Craig Davies,** who designed the monster in the movie, and animated it. Their work is so remarkable you can't help but want to make use of it.

JEFF: *But when you wrote the script no one said there's got to be a monster that's bigger than the robot that he fought in the first film, or you have to have a Robocopmobile or anything like that? Did they give you —*

FRANK: It was as simple as "We want to make another ROBOCOP movie, have you got any ideas? "

JEFF: *That's great. I would tend to think — and maybe this is just the cynic in me — that after the success of the first they would create a whole bunch of marketing ideas and say, "Let's create a movie where we can have a Robocopmobile to sell to the kids, and another big monster that we can merchandise." But there was none of that?*

FRANK: I never felt that I was having anything shoved down my throat. Through all these rewrites, as many as there were, the essential structure and thrust of the story remained unchanged. It was a matter of making the individual pieces work; a matter of responding to what **Phil Tippet** and **Craig Davies** created with the monster, finding a way to make better use of this creation. *(Drinks refilled.)*

JEFF: *Who's the guy — I should know his name because I love special effects stuff — there was somebody else who did the Robocop costume itself in the first film.*

FRANK: Rob Bottin.

JEFF: *Yeah, that's right, Rob Bottin. Did he do it again in this film?*

FRANK: Yes, Rob designed and built the Robocop suits — this time providing

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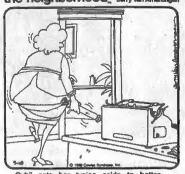

Sybil sets her typing aside to better respond to her boss's latest crisis.

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"I never felt I was having anything shoved down my throat."

Weller a bit more comfort and freedom of mobility. But that's not all he did, and this ties in with what I was saying. One morning during the shoot I let myself sleep late, confident that the scene to be shot was in good shape. I can't really describe the scene without giving away a story point, but it involved a prosthetic body . . . well, **Rob Bottin's** creation arrived just in time for the shoot, and it was a masterpiece. And I'd written the scene as if it were simply a prop. Suddenly we had a new character in the movie, requiring the scene to be completely reconceived and rewritten. Had my first cup of coffee on the set, hashing things out with **Davison** and **Kershner,** writing a brand new — and much better — scene as the crew waited. Took me twenty minutes. My most exciting morning on the set. Now, **Kershner** could have shot the scene as written — but yet another opportunity to make the movie better would have been lost. And **Kershner** was always looking for ways to make it better.

It's one of the best scenes in the movie. It tested the actors to the limit because they had to memorize and interpret and deliver within minutes.

JEFF: *All because of something that Rob Bottin had created.*

FRANK: Because of the opportunity it represented. We *could* have done the old scene but it would have been *wasting* this magnificent thing he created. *That* was a lot of the substance of the rewrites that were done on the set; a full draft from start to finish was done during filming. The movie was literally restructured, particularly the second act. Because I could see what the actors could *do.* **Kershner** and I were constantly talking about what we could do with this movie, with the story.

JEFF: *It is pretty unusual for the screenwriter to remain on the set virtually the whole time it's being filmed.*

FRANK: Usually they don't let them on the set, I'm told. My presence was requested. I'm very glad I went, it was a fascinating education — and it made it a better movie.

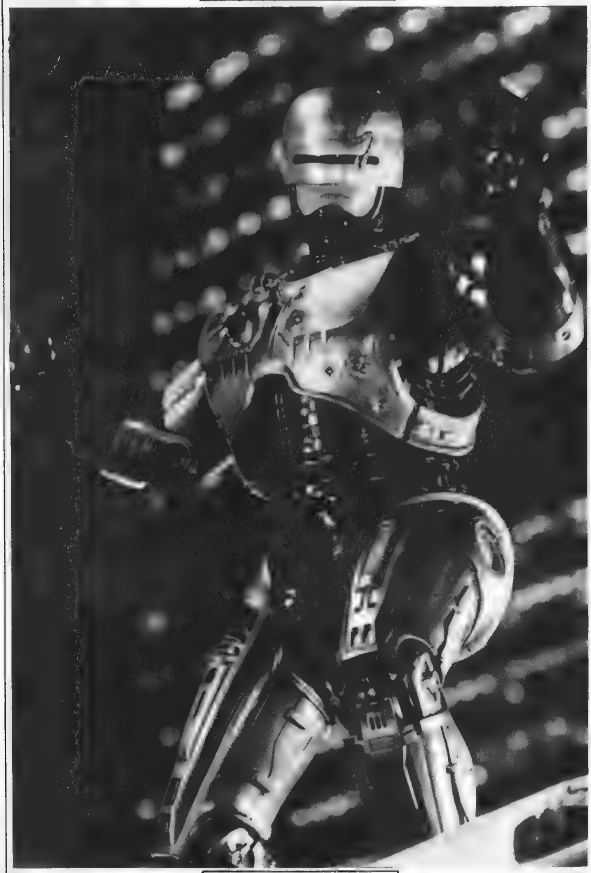
JEFF: *You're a visualist, a guy that thinks visually and always has, so my assumption is this film is going to be long on visuals and . . . not necessarily action but visual moment, and probably short on dialogue. Am I wrong?*

FRANK: Well, it's hard to tell at this point. I've been in the thick of it for so long. I saw a screening two nights ago and I think it's a good movie. There are extensive dialogue scenes . . .

JEFF: *But it's hard to say what the balance really will be.*

FRANK: Yeah. Well, I've seen the movie pretty much as it will be, beyond some fine tuning, and it's very visual. **Kershner** is a very visual director, and the script was very visual.

JEFF: *Let's put it this way: I think*



"My real passion in movies right now is to direct."

ROBOCOP appeals to two schools, action film fans and people who appreciate the satirical aspects of it, the fact that it doesn't take itself entirely seriously. So, if you just came in as an action film fan, you won't be disappointed?

FRANK: I don't believe so. I don't believe so. There's *plenty* of action, and it's pretty inventive action

JEFF: *Well, on the basis of this thing essentially being done, do you want to do more screenplays? What is your sense as to where you want to take this as a career step?*

FRANK: I'm writing more — I'm at work on another screenplay right now, an original. Six months in Houston, Texas watching a movie being filmed by an expert has given me a huge urge to direct. And I'm still cartooning.

JEFF: *So, this just gives you something else to try to figure out how to sandwich into your life.*

FRANK: *(Laughter.)* I learned a lot on this movie. I found out that I like the way movies are made, for all of the maddening twists and turns you take. I like working with actors — for all the maddening twists and turns *they* take. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Were they respectful of you as a beginner? In other words, could they — I'm not sure how directly you really worked with the actors, I would suppose you'd almost have to.*

FRANK: Day in, day out I worked with the cast. **Kershner** encouraged it. He seeks a deep level of involvement from everybody. It's actually a lot of fun to work with actors. They bring an interesting perspective — and lack of perspective to the film. After all, it's their job to bring a moment to life while facing bright lights and a hundred crew members.

JEFF: *But did you find it hard to earn their respect since this is your first screenplay?*

FRANK: I don't think many of them even *knew* that this was my first screenplay.

JEFF: *Did any of them know of your comics background?*

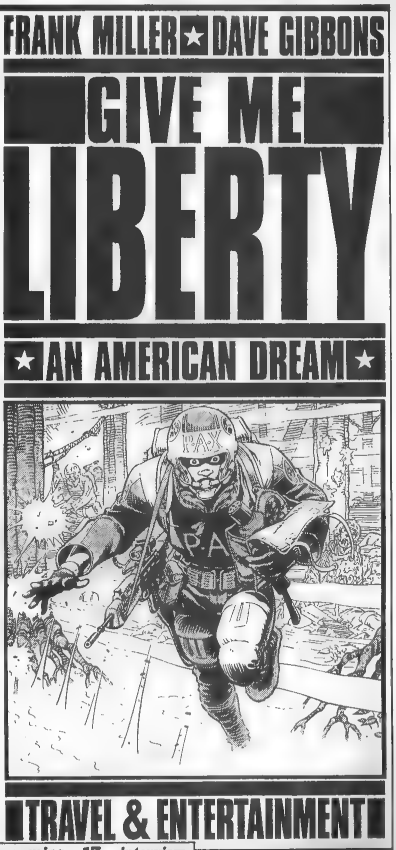
FRANK: Some.

JEFF: *Had any of them ever read DARK KNIGHT or anything else?*

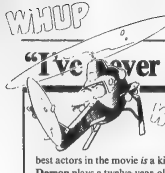
FRANK: Oh yeah, oh yeah — as a matter of fact I gave a few copies out during shooting.

JEFF: *What response did you get back? Did you get the usual "Gee. I haven't read comics since I was a kid" sort of thing?*

FRANK: Mostly, although one of the



"I've never accepted the notion of an auteur."



best actors in the movie *is* a kid. **Gabriel Damon** plays a twelve-year-old hit man. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *What about Irvin, did you give him one?*

FRANK: Yeah, yeah.

JEFF: *What was his response?*

FRANK: Enthusiasm — but not until he got a chance to look at it. You've got to understand that when he's making a movie he's *making* a movie. If it doesn't have anything to do with the movie, you haven't got time for it. You're working sixteen hours a day, shooting for twelve hours a day, *all* the focus is on the movie. It was a grueling schedule. **Kersh** came in only a couple of months before shooting, so there was a very brief preproduction time — that was one of the reasons why it was still being written on the set. He had his own particular *passions*, his ways of hooking into the material, his things to *offer* to the script that *had* to be observed because they were very good.

JEFF: *Did you ever find yourself offering visual ideas, drawing things?*

FRANK: I didn't draw much. Worked with the art department a lot, worked with **Kersh** a lot.

JEFF: *But no storyboard stuff.*

FRANK: I didn't storyboard.

JEFF: *Was there a storyboard artist?*

FRANK: Yeah. **Giacomo Ghiazza.** He did a lot of storyboards, especially for the animation.

JEFF: *How was his work?*

FRANK: Oh, it was very nice, *forceful*, energetic stuff. It was predominantly done for the scenes that required stop-motion animation.

JEFF: *Is there a lot of that?*

FRANK: Yes.

JEFF: *That'll be fun — I loved the stop-motion stuff in the first film. Do you have any desire to storyboard?*

FRANK: I'd rather draw comics. *(Laughter.)* This has taken me so far away from drawing that I'm rusty as can be — I've done one drawing in the past year. But no, my real passion in movies right now is to direct; to play with the whole mess and move all the pieces around.

JEFF: *But on the other hand, as far as your future as a screenplay writer is concerned, needless to say the rumors are already floating out. I heard that you were working on a TERMINATOR screenplay.*

FRANK: Not true, I've never even been asked.

JEFF: *It seemed logical except maybe for you.* (Laughter.) *I mean, I can see why they would do it but I don't see why you would do it. You would like to do your own work I take it.*

FRANK: Oh, yeah, just as I do with my comics. Although . . . ROBOCOP is so well conceived, it seems to have been adapted from a comic, as if writers **Ed Neumeier** and **Michael Miner** and director **Paul Verhoorven** took the heart of what's really good about modern comics and created a character who used all of the devices of film. One of the first things that struck me about it was they actually managed to have the first movie character who had thought balloons.

JEFF: *That's true.*

FRANK: Showing things through his eyes, showing his thoughts — it works *beautifully.*

JEFF: *You took advantage of that, I'm sure.*

FRANK: Oh, yes. It's one of the best devices the character has.

JEFF: *I hadn't even thought about that.*

FRANK: Also, the *humor* that's built into that character is a joy, and a perfect contrast to the agony.

JEFF: *What kind of film would you like to direct?*

FRANK: *(Pause.)* Same kind I'd like to write: suspense, action, a story about heroes.

JEFF: *Is that the kind of screenplay that you're working on now?*

Panel from Frank Miller's GIVE ME LIBERTY. Art by Dave Gibbons.

FRANK: Yeah.

JEFF: *So, at this point it's a whole new field.*

FRANK: Yes.

JEFF: *The movie took you away from comics for two years, or did you actually have time to do any comics work in the last couple of years?*

FRANK: Oh, I've been doing comics.

JEFF: *None of them have come out.*

FRANK: They're all coming out this summer, they'll all start coming out around June or July.

JEFF: *Well, let's start talking about those then. What do you suppose will come out first?*

FRANK: The first book out will probably be my book with **Dave Gibbons,** GIVE ME LIBERTY.

JEFF: *Mini-series?*

FRANK: A four-issue series in the DARK KNIGHT format — and it's Dave and I having a *lot* of fun. It's a story of a young ghetto kid named Martha Washington. The story begins in the '90s and carries on into the next century, it's her adventures and misadventures across the future of America. And we've had a *ball* painting a portrait of the future of America.

JEFF: *You make it sound like Dave is very much a member of the creative team, he's not just illustrating your ideas.*

FRANK: I've never been in a situation where that was the case, I've never even *seen* a situation where that was the case. Simply *by* illustrating a scene it is given different meaning. I don't believe in any auteur writer in comics — I've never accepted the notion of an auteur from either end of the craft. As the pictures come in they're going to affect what I write. I often rewrite over the artwork even though I do provide a full script from the start.

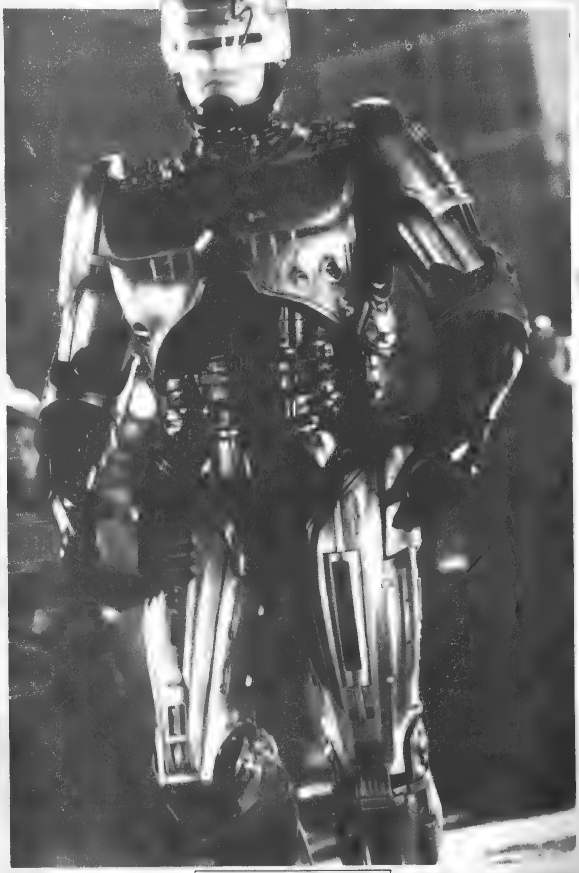
The mix of personalities is one of the most fascinating things in a collaboration. Working with **David Mazzucchelli** on DAREDEVIL and BATMAN: YEAR ONE, I believe both books were very much the products of our personalities. His work is amazing. The *leaps* he made just across the work we did together. I think BATMAN: YEAR ONE is one of the best illustrated comics ever done.

JEFF: *I agree. As a person who has read comics for as many as 30 years, I ache to see more work that is that good.*

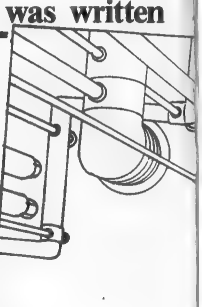
FRANK: We miss you, David.

JEFF: *Yeah.*

FRANK: And just to continue the point, working with **Bill Sienkiewicz** on ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN the shape of the



"ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN was written



story changed as the pictures came in. He and I discovered, after a number of sessions where we both ended up on the floor laughing at 3:00 in the morning, that we both wanted to do something a lot funnier than what was originally intended. Working with **Lynn Varley**, particularly on the ELEKTRA book, my line art was so vastly amplified and reinterpreted that the book is much more defined as a horror story than it would have been. Lynn gave the art in ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN its lighting, its temperature, its tone. I'm touching up the script to take advantage of her work. You can't work with people and not make use of them, of what they're offering.

And with **Dave Gibbons,** he and I had one critical session where . . . we seemed to be running out of *steam* on the project, and we had a long talk about abandoning it, about this, about that. Some 100 pages had been written, a good 30 had been drawn, and we discovered that we were *both* aching to go in a different direction with our work in general, one that was a bit sillier, a bit more preposterous, and a bit more of an action/adventure kind of story. Suddenly everything got better — the words, the pictures — because we're enjoying ourselves. Dave's work on LIBERTY is beautiful, and I believe Martha is a very endearing heroine. The direction we had been pursuing before was much more overtly political, and much more grim.

JEFF: *Now, can you turn that kind of corner that far into a book?*

FRANK: Oh, yeah. It's *so* fluid — because all the elements that we wanted were there, it was just a matter of removing some things, playing others up. Dave essentially redrew all of his work, I rewrote my script — nothing's set in stone until it's published. It's much like developing a movie, how we went through such a critical change in tone.

JEFF: *Did your — I was going to ask you this pretty soon anyway — do you think your work on ROBOCOP had anything to do with your change in ideas toward comics?*

FRANK: Yeah. For a number of months I didn't work in comics and . . . I can break it into two main effects. One was that I came to cherish the amount of freedom you have in comics, because there's so much less in film. This encouraged me to take ideas further, to take more chances, and also to bring much more a sense of joy to what I was doing.

The other thing is being away from comics I was able to kind of see what had happened since 1986. DARK KNIGHT and WATCHMEN came out and everything kind of changed on us. All of a sudden we're being interviewed on MTV and even by literary journals. I felt that what I was seeing, and some of what I had been doing, had *lost* that sense of joy I was referring to — and I wanted *more* of that.

I wanted to do comics that made better use of what comics can really do. It's no coincidence that comic books produced the superhero. The form produced the creation there, because the form — even before **Kirby** and especially *since* him — the visual kinetics of the comic-book page lend it to extravagant action.

JEFF: *The very four-color nature of it.*

FRANK: Not so much the limitations of the printing — all three of these projects will feature painted color, good paper, etc. What I'm talking about is the advantage comics have over other media, their particular character — what they can do best. Comics are not prose . . . and my personal feeling is that there's a danger of losing a lot of their virtues by not making use of the visual vitality the form is capable of — as well as the humor. Dave and I had a long talk where we rethought our whole approach to this project. And I think it's a lot funnier for it. I think it's a lot better, too.

JEFF: *It's interesting that the ROBOCOP experience changed your perspective a little bit. Well, it wasn't just ROBOCOP, it was also what you had gone through with the media hoopla and stuff.*

FRANK: M-hm.

JEFF: *All of which makes you grow as a writer. So, what we see when this material starts coming out will be a different facet of what you want to talk about?*

FRANK: It's very different than the stuff that I did last. ELEKTRA is by far and away the darkest of the bunch.

JEFF: *This is the book that you wrote and drew. What would you call Lynn's contribution? It's not just colorist.*

FRANK: I know, it's a tough one to name. I've called it painting, I've called it color art — it's tough to find a label.

JEFF: *When did you complete your drawing for the book? This was awhile ago, wasn't it?*

FRANK: Oh, months and months ago, yeah — about a year ago. And again, that was a book that got rethought and rethought and rethought and I threw out half the pages I had produced.

JEFF: *But that one became darker?*

FRANK: It just became truer to what Elektra . . . the great thing about Elektra is that I don't have to tell her anything, I just put her in the story and she runs away with it.

JEFF: *Is this a one-shot?*

FRANK: It's a graphic novel, it's going to be about 80 pages long.

JEFF: *When is that due out?*

FRANK: It's not scheduled yet. That's really up to Marvel — once we turn it in to them, that is. You know, there's all the stages of separation and design, and there's some rewriting I want to do now. It's so great to have a book in your hands and actually have the time to touch it up in just those little places it needs. In all

and drawn across a period of several years."

ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN, by Miller & Co.

fairness, I must say that Epic Comics, particularly **Margaret Clark**, the editor of the book, has been very patient through endless delays that were almost entirely my fault. It's true that there were foul-ups on the publisher's end — graphic novels in America are at a pretty confused stage, and Margaret came in late in the process on this one to straighten it out — but the holdups in producing ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN were mostly due to my creative struggle in preparing it. It was written and drawn across a period of several years, during which my thinking about my work underwent radical change . . . I started it fresh from my first stint on DAREDEVIL — and am completing the last bits of it having lived through RONIN, DARK KNIGHT, ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN, and ROBOCOP 2. It's been quite a journey. ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN has gone through many changes, all of which, I believe, has made it a better and truer piece of work than the one I conceived while still a member of the Marvel Comics stable. Less mired in Marvel Comics convention — and more a story that lets Elektra be as lethal and ultimately doomed a figure as she is.

JEFF: *So, for those who need that side of you, that'll be the book this year that they should look for.*

FRANK: Well, I don't know, it's not like DARK KNIGHT. It's scary. I think it's kind of sexy.

JEFF: *How much does it have to do with the ELEKTRA mini-series that you did before?*

FRANK: About halfway through drawing the ELEKTRA graphic novel I wrote the entire ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN series, so Elektra had eight issues to tell me *more* things about herself. . . .

JEFF: *I didn't realize you had been working on this that long.*

FRANK: Oh, yes, it's been . . . I abandoned it frequently as it became very difficult to work on. It was worth it, though. But as far as how "dark" it is, it's hard for me to tell. "Dark". . . I hate that

"Marvel and DC have both become manageme[illegible] eavy."

Odd-shaped panel from page 57 of ELEKTRA.

term. As far as I can tell a comic book is called "dark" if it doesn't conform to the sweetness-and-light perfect world of the Comics Code. I mean, come *on*. Fantasy always has a source, and the real world from which fantasies are created is not right now a paradise. Every time I think I do something *cheerful*, people call it dark. *(Laughter.)*

But the book I'm doing with **Geof Darrow**, HARD BOILED, may well be the one that makes the censors the craziest. It's visually extravagant, it's visually *excessive*. The first two chapters are an action run, and that's a real wild piece of work.

JEFF: *What's the format for this book?*

FRANK: It's going to be a magazine-size 32-page book that will run for four chapters.

JEFF: *Why the larger size?*

FRANK: The artwork is so complex that even the magazine size is reducing it so far it's painful. The artwork is astonishingly detailed.

JEFF: *Realistic?*

FRANK: Realistic is a word that always gives me a lot of trouble. What's realistic? Geof's work is cartooned, it's very detailed, it's very absurd. People will regard it as realistic, I'll put it that way. Cloth falls like cloth and people are the same height as people. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *We might have glossed over ELEKTRA too quickly, should you say anything about the storyline?*

FRANK: Well, the title is about as far as I go; it's called ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN. Matt Murdock is the lead character in the story. He is *haunted* by dreams of her return and increasing evidence that she's coming back, and she does. ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN takes place following the last issue of DAREDEVIL I drew — "Roulette" was the title — and the first I wrote with **David Mazzucchelli** drawing. Much of Matt's nervous breakdown in the "Born Again" series was the result of the trauma Matt suffers in ELEKTRA.

JEFF: *And what about HARD BOILED?*

FRANK: HARD BOILED refers more to the character's mental state than anything else. Our lead character is a government operative who's superhumanly tough and strong, and has a problem of . . . of frequently changing identities and not knowing which one is real. He starts the story as a tax collector and then finds himself as an insurance investigator with a different name, and his main quest in the story is to sort through it all and find out what he really is. Visually it takes place in Darrowland. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *I guess it has to be seen to be understood.*

FRANK: If that's our future then we're in *real* trouble. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Does he do work like Sienkiewicz or Dave McKean where they incorporate real pieces of cloth and bugs and metal and stuff?*

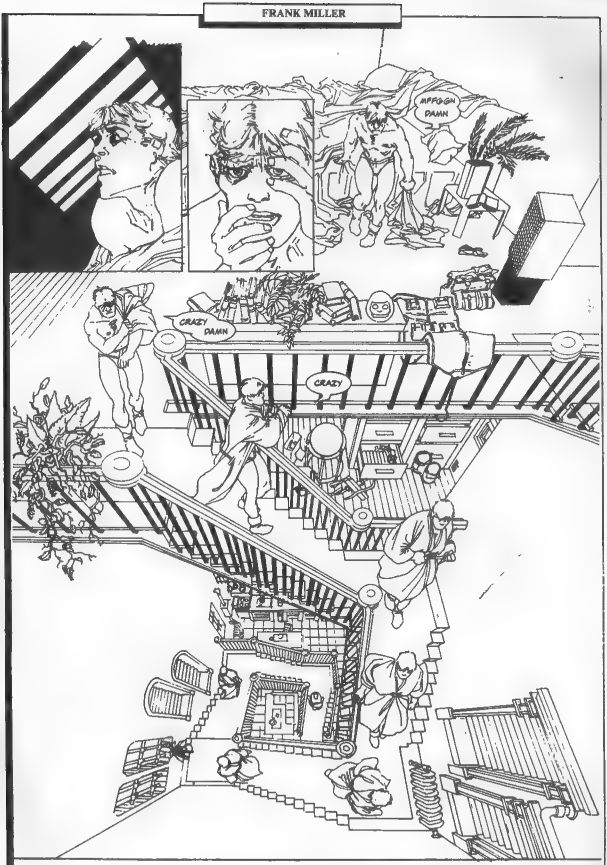
FRANK: No, it's all line, it's all drawn. And it's all cartoon. That's, interestingly enough, true of all three books we're talking about.

JEFF: *It's funny. I didn't know until today that HARD BOILED was in a different format than comics size. And yet it's not what you would call a graphic novel format?*

FRANK: It's not square bound, so I don't think anybody would call it that. It's just the format that is most appropriate to the material. It's nice to have the format determined by the material instead of the reverse.

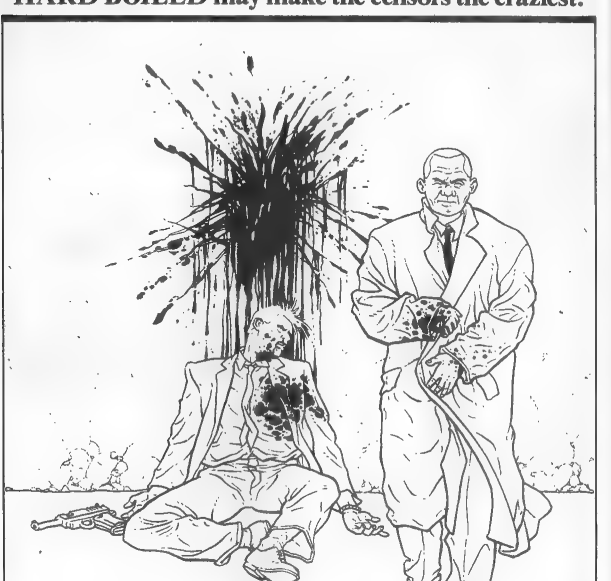
JEFF: *Well, my assumption is that that's the same reasoning behind what Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz did with BIG NUMBERS, is that they let the material dictate the format.*

FRANK: Yeah, I'm sure it is. I know Bill's having a great time with those square pages.



Beautiful one-pager from ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN, from Marvel Comics.

"HARD BOILED may make the censors the craziest."



Above & next page: Artwork from Miller's HARD BOILED. Art by Geof Darrow.

JEFF: *Do you think there's some danger, though, in terms of retailers or just people saying they don't know how to store this so they're not going to bother with it or anything like that?*

FRANK: Sure, but I can't think about that end of things — that's what publishers are for. There's always dangers. Everybody was kind of scared when we were putting DARK KNIGHT out that the format would put people off. Now it's become a pretty standard accepted format, in fact the market has been *flooded* with it. I don't know what'll happen with any of the books. I never do.

Geof and I sat down with Dark Horse, **Randy Stradley** and **Mike Richardson**, and talked over a wide variety of ways to treat this material, and settled on that one as one that was appropriate to the form but still with . . . would not ruin the retailers' lives. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Why Dark Horse? Why is this not automatically a DC or Marvel concept?*

FRANK: I thought it would be healthy to take some work somewhere else. I talked it over with Dave and with Geof. We considered publishing it ourselves, then dropped that idea. I was specifically looking for a situation where we could have total autonomy on a book. I have felt that Marvel and DC have both become more management heavy, and knowing from past experience that they are *extremely* prone to succumbing to outside pressure, and knowing that the material in these books was going to offend all the right people, it seemed logical to find a publisher, to make an

HARD BOILED

offer to a publisher, who was not bogged down in traditions that were so against the purposes of the project.

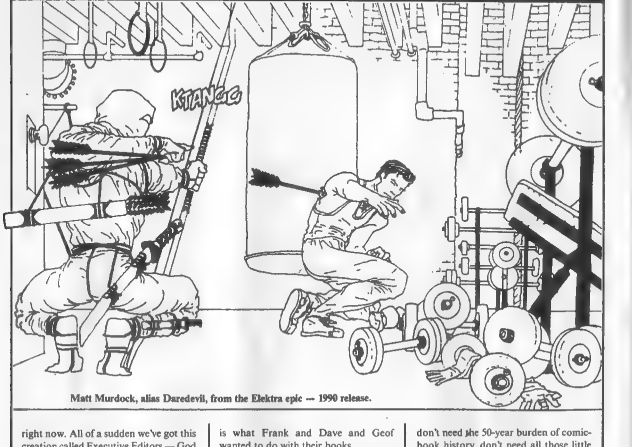
JEFF: *Maybe — I don't want to put words in your mouth so tell me if I'm wrong — but is it also a function of the fact that both companies now are owned by huge conglomerates?*

FRANK: M-hm.

JEFF: *And it's that you can't just please a Jenette Kahn or someone else, you have to be aware that there are guys in positions far beyond her that have to either approve the book or approve the direction or —*

FRANK: You just *always* know there's more variables. They're always hiring more people at the top, Marvel and DC

"The material in these books was certainly



Matt Murdock, alias Daredevil, from the Elektra epic — 1990 release.

right now. All of a sudden we've got this creation called Executive Editors — God knows *what* they do. But having worked in film I've seen having that many people above, the restrictions it imposes, and I just felt that I didn't need so many bosses. And also, when you work for Marvel or DC your work is almost automatically fed into a gristmill for film, for toys, etc. I wanted to leave the options open, and one of the options I wanted to leave open was prohibiting merchandising and licensing from ever happening to a piece of work, depending upon whether it was appropriate or not.

Now, there are arrangements that *could* be made at Marvel and DC *for* that sort of thing, but that would be another point in negotiation. And I didn't see any reason why not to take it to a small publisher that had a world to conquer. They've got a lot of energy — they're producing some good stuff. And coming in I don't have to ask questions about copyright, trademarks, etc., it's all understood.

JEFF: *Does this suggest that it's almost impossible to do a book through one of the two mainstream publishers that aims for something higher?*

FRANK: What this suggests is that this is what Frank and Dave and Geof wanted to do with their books.

There's good and bad with working with the majors. The good, in my case, is that I've got a hero that I fell in love with, Daredevil — I go back to him from time to time and enjoy it thoroughly. And, obviously, there's the advantage of a built-in readership that's going to at least show up to look at the cover. The negatives are, again, there's so many people in charge. And there's this company overview, this continuity *monster* of everything crossing over eighteen different ways. Creatively it's a lot more restrictive. There's also the *worry* that some of the material I'm doing will make some kinds of people very angry, so I want a publisher that believes in what I'm doing, and is willing to defend it.

JEFF: *I guess the point is that you have to go where your material takes you.*

FRANK: One of my books *is* a Marvel book this year, one of my books next year will probably be a Marvel book. I've made some friends of these characters and I'm not saying never again. But right now my main focus is on creating new characters, new heroes.

I've got a lot of ideas about what I think we could do with heroes, ideas that don't need the 50-year burden of comic-book history, don't need all those little details encumbering them.

JEFF: *On the other hand, is there perhaps still one more character that you would like to give your touch to that's within the existing universes?*

FRANK: I don't know, not that I can think of. Nothing leaps to mind. I even got to do Captain America in my DAREDEVIL run, he was the big one that I was hoping to get my hands on.

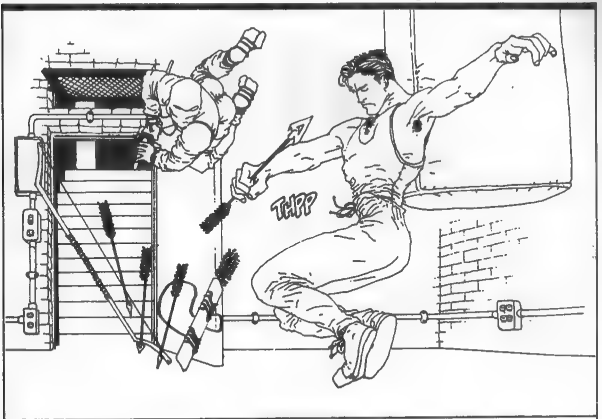
JEFF: *Well, is there a fourth book that you're working on now?*

FRANK: Yeah, it's a DAREDEVIL graphic novel which is a huge, *expansive*, embroidered *origin* story, much like BATMAN: YEAR ONE. It'll be full of surprises. I've done more DARE-DEVILs than I've done *anything*, and I was able to go back and take the existing origin and add to it a great deal. A great deal of drama. It's mainly a character story, it's mainly about who Matt Mur-dock is. It's also a crime story, it includes an appearance of the Kingpin that pre-dates any of the previous appearances of the Kingpin. And **John Romita** is drawing it.

JEFF: *Senior? Junior?*

FRANK: Junior. **John S. Romita** I think

going to offend all the right people."



he goes by now. And the stuff is gorgeous.

JEFF: *How far along is that?*

FRANK: Oh, he's well into the pencil stage. For me it's a real work of love because Matt's just somebody I know — that's all there is to it.

JEFF: *Almost like someone you could call up on the telephone.*

FRANK: I remember, the first time I left DAREDEVIL I thought, "I'll never do *that* again." And I've bounced back a couple of times.

JEFF: *Now, is there any thing left unsaid about Batman that you would come back and say? Have you ever, like, woken up in the night and thought, "Why didn't I do that?"*

FRANK: Oh, yeah. Are you kidding, I plotted a sequel to DARK KNIGHT. But I won't do it. Batman isn't like Matt. Matt's someone with a full range of human emotion who manages to be a hero in spite of himself. Batman is a Wagnerian character to my mind — it's *bigger* than the rest of us, he's a *giant*, but with a single theme.

And after having done his last case and his first, I kind of feel like I got it off my chest. I certainly satisfied that six-year-old in me who fell in love with Batman. Also, I don't know how much anybody . . . the BATMAN material they are producing at DC right now doesn't indicate to me that there'd be as much freedom for a personal point of view on the character.

DON'T TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL, JOHN
MARTHA, YOU'VE BARELY TOUCHED YOUR DINNER. NOW YOU KNOW THAT TURKEY'S JUST AS GOOD AS IF I'D COOKED IT MYSELF...
GLPP YES, MOM
YES, MOM. YOU CAN SIT DOWN NOW, MOM

Panel from GIVE ME LIBERTY.

"With DARK KNIGHT I realized I couldn't kill Batman."

Elektra at work/play. From Miller/Marvel's ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN.

JEFF: *Have you kept in touch with the stuff since DARK KNIGHT?*

FRANK: I've seen it from time to time.

JEFF: *Any reaction to ARKHAM ASYLUM, for example?*

FRANK: Not really, no reaction.

JEFF: *Is that essentially why you would shy away from following up on your own proposed sequel to DARK KNIGHT?*

FRANK: Well, there's a couple of reasons. DARK KIGHT is a very *contained* piece of work, and *I'm* very happy with its resolution, where it leaves Batman in the story. To come back and do it again, it feels to me, would not be the most challenging thing I've ever done. And in a way it would be exploiting DARK KNIGHT. There's enough of that going on already.

JEFF: *Yeah, it would be an enormous challenge to make a sequel stand up by itself.*

FRANK: It's not as free-form and open-ended as all my DAREDEVIL work is. Whenever I finish a story, I've got the next chapter in mind. I try to end stories as early as possible *with* a sense of possibility. With DARK KNIGHT I was very determined — because I'd gone through every scenario including him dying at the end, and then I realized I couldn't kill *Batman*. Nobody would believe it.

JEFF: *Was that more than a fifteen-minute soul-searching conversation?*

FRANK: It was a while there.

JEFF: *Did you talk to DC about that?*

FRANK: Yeah. I talked to **Dick Giordano** about it *long* before I ever started — this was back at the earliest stages of jotting down notes. Dick was open to just about anything. He liked the kind of death I had proposed, a bit of a BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID death where you'd see him just before the last moment. But as I was working on it, as Batman was surging through my veins — *(Laughter.)* I realized that trying to kill Batman was futile — he's a folk hero. Daredevil could die in a story, but Batman's too big for that.

And . . . I wanted to leave Batman looking forward to his next adventure. I wanted to leave him with that. There is a *joy* to that character. He's not just a brooding, pouting, glum, depressed vigilante. He *likes* what he does.

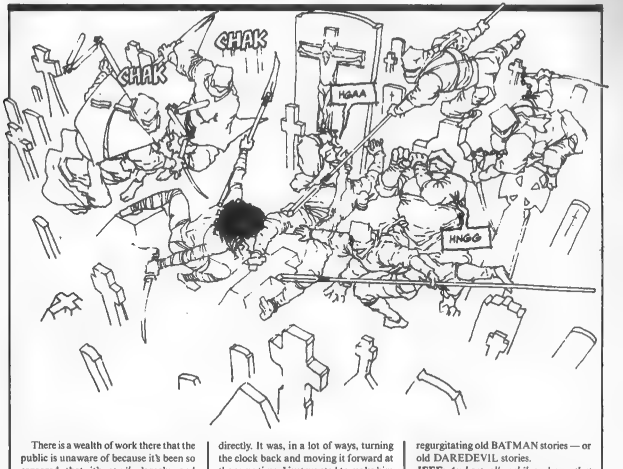
JEFF: *Well, let me go backwards with you for a second because I never got to ask you any questions when those books came out. What was your thought about the fact that it actually broke through barriers, that that series went beyond comics as far as it did? Did you expect it to? Did you ever think you were doing more than just a good comic book there?*

FRANK: It *wasn't* more than just a good comic book. It was good fortune that it got so much attention. It was good timing, it was a character that people knew — and the best way to make everybody notice that comic books had changed was to show them one of the *icons* in more contemporary and less compromised terms. *(Waiter takes plates.)*

JEFF: *Was that one of your goals?*

FRANK: I told myself when I started out that I was going to do the great American superhero story, that I was going to take one of these old myths and make the character as old as the myth and just play it out and see where it went. No, I wasn't picturing articles in ROLLING STONE or coverage on the AP wire. When that came, though, it had to be taken for what it was. DARK KNIGHT was in the right place at the right time to *get* the attention that was kind of earned by *generations* of craftsmen. It was earned by **Bob Kane, Dick Sprang, Jerry Robinson, Neal Adams,** and also by **Jack Kirby.**

"Daredevil could die in a story. Batman's too big for that."



There is a wealth of work there that the public is unaware of because it's been so censored that it's *sterile* largely, and because comics have branded themselves as pallid crap for little kids. It was not — and I don't mean to sound self-effacing because I do think it's a good piece of work, — but it was a well *placed* piece of work with a very familiar hero. It could have been Superman that did it; it was Batman instead because Batman probably more accurately mirrors our times.

JEFF: *True. I did an interview with Bob Kane before the BATMAN film, it was in COMICS INTERVIEW, and asked him what he thought of DARK KNIGHT. He said he was very happy it was a success but he didn't understand it.*

FRANK: *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *And I asked him if the two of you had ever spoken —*

FRANK: No, we've never met. I'd like to meet him sometime.

JEFF: *I think you should. It was funny, he started asking me questions about what some of the symbolism meant, but I'm not inside your head, I couldn't answer for you.*

FRANK: Well, it was *his* work, and **Bill Finger's** and **Dick Sprang's** and **Jerry Robinson's**, that I was drawing most directly. It was, in a lot of ways, turning the clock back and moving it forward at the same time. I just wanted to make him *big* again.

JEFF: *Well, you did that and then some. So, now as you get on with your own work, I can see where it's obviously a lot more satisfying for you to take projects on that are all yours.*

FRANK: M-hm.

JEFF: *I notice that they're all self contained.*

FRANK: Yes.

JEFF: *Do you have any interest in doing a continuing character or series again?*

FRANK: Well, sure, but . . . after GIVE ME LIBERTY, if Dave's up for it, I'd love to do another one. The reason I like the contained series is the idea doesn't get a chance to be worn out. You do it, you carry it through, you end it, and then if you have *another* movement this character can go through, or another adventure, or another *perspective* on the character, you can do it.

I think the monthly pulps, just by the structure of that monthly schedule, *everything* gets dried up. Then they start renumbering them and doing whole stories over again. My involvement with Batman was short-term, I'd *hate* to be regurgitating old BATMAN stories — or old DAREDEVIL stories.

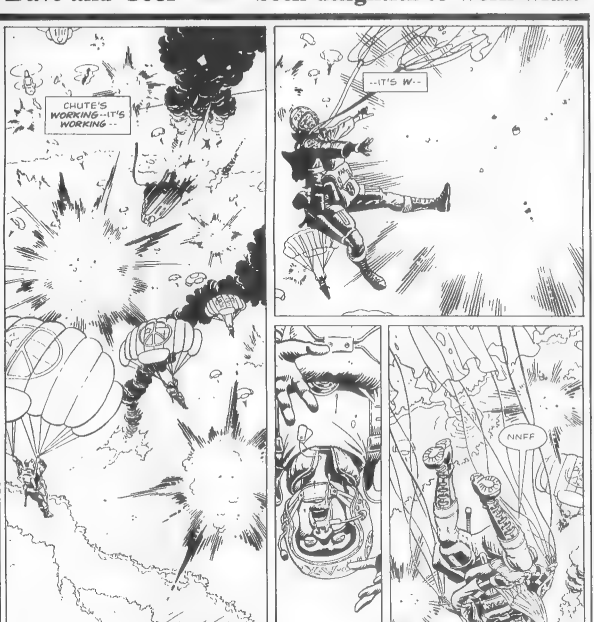
JEFF: *And actually, while we're on that topic, should we assume that once these books start coming out that there will be a confined period of time in which they actually all will come out?*

FRANK: Yes.

JEFF: *Well, you know, comics readers get a little paranoid after several years when nothing has come out on time.*

FRANK: Yes — and the assumption is that delays are always the fault of the talent. Sometimes, as with ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN, this is true. But many, many other times, it isn't. Publishers are anything but infallible. For instance, DC Comics delivered the bluelines for DARK KNIGHT #1 many weeks later than scheduled, though the black-and-white artwork had been delivered on time. They just sat in a desk, I'm told, while Lynn waited, while I called and called. I told them that this would cause delays because Lynn was doing much more than a traditional coloring job. I told them exactly how late the work would be, how unworkable they'd made the monthly schedule. They stonewalled me, and the series came out exactly as I predicted it. This sort of thing happens

"Dave and Geof have been delightful to work with."



From GIVE ME LIBERTY, by Miller & Gibbons.

much more frequently than publishers would like you to think.

JEFF: *But in this case, I'm assuming, you have a lot more say over when the books actually start coming out, so you know the schedule will be able to be maintained.*

FRANK: Dave and Geof and I are in collaboration with the Dark Horse, and they have been delightful to work with. The books will probably alternate months, that's the plan right now - LIBERTY will come out in June, I believe, HARD BOILED in July, then LIBERTY, then HARD BOILED, and so on.

JEFF: *This is a strange question, but of the two of those books do you have a sense of which one will actually be more popular?*

FRANK: I try not to ever think that way.

JEFF: *I don't blame you.*

FRANK: Right, it's insane. I find that planning for popularity is a real fast way to turn out garbage. *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Let's get back to your thoughts about a continuing series. You obviously*

Geof Darrow illustration, from HARD BOILED.

"I can't read DAREDEVIL, I can't read

have a lot of ideas in your head, would you have any interest, for example, in creating a lexicon for characters that other people could develop?

FRANK: No, no. I work from character out, the plot follows the character. The idea of making them up and then thrusting them on somebody else would make me crazy. That's why I can't read characters after I've finished working on them. I can't read DAREDEVIL, I can't read BATMAN, I'm just going to hate every word of it because I didn't *do* it. I'm totally obsessive that way. I get *locked* on my own version of things and I can't accept anybody else's.

JEFF: *And it's impossible for any two versions to be the same.*

FRANK: Right, yes.

JEFF: *I can see that, but I'm thinking of something like AMERICAN FLAGG or JON SABLE where Chaykin and Grell created those books and then moved on and they were picked up by others. You don't see that as a possibility?*

FRANK: Absolutely not. What I can offer in my work is my sincerity and my intent, whether it's right or wrong. The *last* thing I would want to do is to feed ideas into the same gristmill that's been taking the life out of comics for 50 years.

This, again, is a problem with the monthly schedule. I understand the economic reasons for it, but you see characters go through exciting periods and then as much as 20 years they'll slump, to the point where it becomes common wisdom that this character is a loser. It's like the drunk on your corner who just won't go *away*. I would rather see these characters go away for awhile. I would rather not see Captain America or whoever for ten years until someone has really *got* something that's really good to do with him.

JEFF: *Yeah, but the market dictates otherwise. And the one thing that I have noticed the older I get, and I suppose the more cynical I get, or the more businesslike that I get, is that most of these books don't appear to exist for much other than merchandising reasons.*

FRANK: But then somebody gets all hot and bothered over a character and you've got something wonderful happening. Whoever thought SWAMP THING would go through such a revival? That's where exciting comics happen.

JEFF: *And actually, you know, if you didn't have to feed that monthly machine you wouldn't necessarily have something like that happen.*

FRANK: M-hm. When the news stories came out about DARK KNIGHT some of them stated that DC Comics had started publishing BATMAN again. *(Laughter.)* I just feel that I would rather read occasionally a really sincere effort on the character than pick it up on the off chance.

JEFF: *Do you read any comics on a regular basis?*

FRANK: Yeah. I read YUMMY FUR every time it comes out, I like that a lot.

JEFF: *So do I, but how do you define why?* (Laughter.)

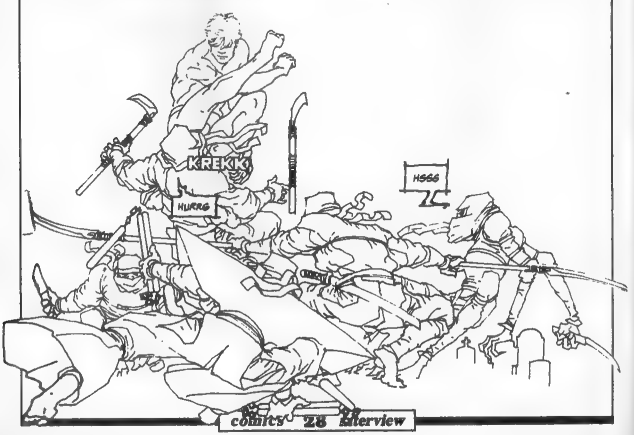
FRANK: I can't. It's definitely the most personal thing out there.

JEFF: *What else do you read?*

FRANK: I read RAW and CEREBUS and LONE WOLF AND CUB and TABOO, A1 . . . let's see . . . I'll probably think of some others after we leave here.

JEFF: *You aim toward more personal books, books with an intensely personal vision?*

FRANK: Yeah. Whenever I get a chance to read a good superhero story, I *love* it. I really love it. You see, I don't mind mainstream at all as long as it's really heroic and really exciting. That's *always* what I aim for with DAREDEVIL. It's



BATMAN, I'm going to hate every word."

Above, below and previous page: More ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN.

straightforward adventure stuff with, I think, a really good lead character and good villains.

JEFF: *Here's a thought — would you have any interest in doing a ROBOCOP graphic novel?*

FRANK: Are you kidding, it's been two years.

JEFF: *You've never once had the itch to draw that character, though?*

FRANK: Oh, I drew him in my first presentation piece, it's going to make the cover of this COMICS INTERVIEW.

JEFF: *But that's it?*

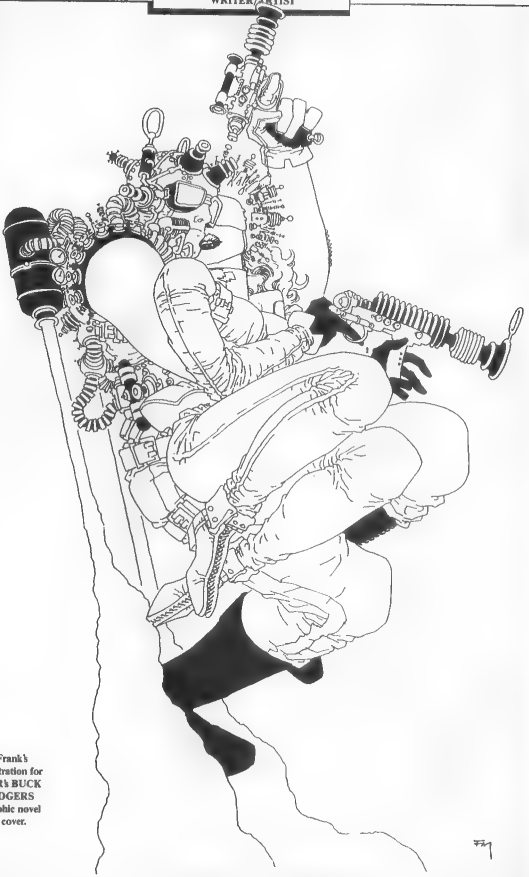
FRANK: Yeah. He's a *movie* character. He's *wonderful* as a movie character. Translating him into a comic book, it just seems to me, would remove the best values the character has, how he sounds, what he sees. He'd just be a less empowered Iron Man.

JEFF: *Well, let's see, what are we forgetting here? Is there another project keeping you busy right now?*

FRANK: No, that's it for the present — everything else is just in that hazy area of development where I'm playing around with ideas.

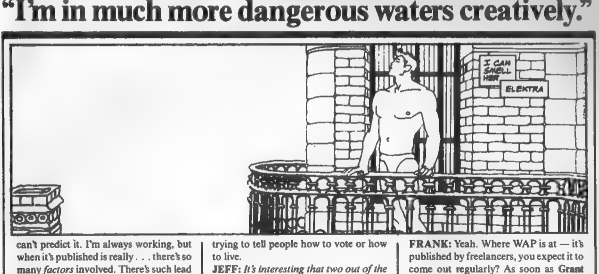
JEFF: *It sounds to me like we're going to see a fair amount of your work in the next six to eight months, maybe more, all in a real burst. But then are you going to go away again? Do you sense more of a continuity of your involvement in comics from here on?*

FRANK: I can't predict it. A year from now I could be doing absolutely nothing but comics, or I could not be doing comics for the next five years — I just



Frank's illustration for TSR's BUCK ROGERS graphic novel cover.

"I'm in much more dangerous waters creatively."



can't predict it. I'm always working, but when it's published is really . . . there's so many *factors* involved. There's such lead time on all my books now, much more lead time than there used to be, because I'm in much more dangerous waters creatively and it's a lot more work to write them.

Coming up with GIVE ME LIBERTY was a hell of a lot more work than picking up DAREDEVIL for six months. I've got to develop an entire world and I've got to get to know the character who is a complete blank slate coming in. Finding Martha's voice took a long time. There is that time it just has to take.

JEFF: *I guess what I want to get a sense of here — and I think you've pretty well stated it already — is that your experience with films has not led you away from wanting to do comics.*

FRANK: No, not at all. As a matter of fact, it's kind of great to be *back*. I've got a lot of comics I want to do, I just try not to answer any questions that go too far into the future because the answers always end up embarrassing me later.

JEFF: *What is your sense of what comics can mean for an audience that's growing older?*

FRANK: Well, understand that this is completely from my perspective, it's not meant to be the sort of manifesto that everybody should follow: To me comics are a private thing and a good time. You sit down to read them and you really enjoy it. *Maybe* it makes you think, maybe it makes you *challenge* something you believe, but all that is secondary.

As a reader, I *love* to fall in love with characters, to get to know them, to see what they go through. I love to see heroics. And I love to see extravagant, wonderful things done by characters that are fascinating. I'm not at all attracted to doing comics with a specific intent to persuade people on political issues. Emotion is what I write about. I'm not trying to tell people how to vote or how to live.

JEFF: *It's interesting that two out of the four of your current projects do not involve you as an artist. Is that a trend that you see continuing?*

FRANK: Three out of the four. I think the next comic that I write after this batch I'm going to draw — I haven't been drawing for *too* long a time, I really feel the itch. Comics happen in pictures.

JEFF: *Do you wish that you could draw everything that you write?*

FRANK: Oh, no, because the collaborations are *fascinating*. I've never worked outside of collaboration, it's *always* been collaboration.

JEFF: *Every time I see your art it seems to take another jump. Do you have a sense of what your artwork will be the next time you sit down and draw?*

FRANK: The stuff I'm playing with right now, the stuff I want to do, is probably more cartooney and more traditional in many senses. I did a cover for TSR's BUCK ROGERS graphic novel and that was a *ball* to do just because, you know, that's one more icon out there that we haven't *done* anything with. That was a ball. And I guess the way I will illustrate my own comics in the future is probably going to be very straightforward, very informational, with a lot of movement.

JEFF: *Interesting. I'm not sure what it* means, *but it's interesting.* (Laughter.)

FRANK: The overall thing that I guess I'm after in comics — this is going to sound strange given that my stories tend to happen with obsessive people living in a world that's falling apart — but there's a sense of *joy* that I really want to bring to them.

JEFF: *That's good, that's an interesting step for you. Now, I'm not sure how many of the readers of COMICS INTERVIEW will know about WAP, but is there something that we should mention about where WAP is at?*

FRANK: Yeah. Where WAP is at — it's published by freelancers, you expect it to come out regularly? As soon as **Grant** and **Gerber** and I can get clear enough, we're coming out with the next issue of it.

JEFF: *What was your goal in creating this newsletter?*

FRANK: It's the goal that was stated in the first issue: the publications that comment on comics tend all to be done from the publishers' perspective — they're either beholden to their advertisers or published by the comic-book publishers themselves — and that among the talent there had to be more communication. And it also just felt like the time to stir up trouble, things were getting a little too stale.

JEFF: *Do you feel WAP was an element of its time and perhaps its time passed, or will there always be a reason to do it?*

FRANK: I think there's going to be a reason off and on. We're in less political times right now. Or maybe I'm wrong, maybe those politics are happening and I'm just out of touch because I don't live in New York and am not as involved with the major publishers. But from my colleagues I get the sense that things have quieted down.

WAP really grew out of COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, the debate over the ratings systems. COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE featured *most* of the debate, and we felt that we needed to have more of a vehicle than that because there were a number of other issues going on. It also was just a growing sense of impatience and fury at the plantation mentality that's run comics for 50 years. And, predictably, the product that came out, the newsletter that came out, was very *barbed*, was very *angry*, and for that reason was very *healthy*. I think it had a pretty quick, palpable effect, and I'm sure there's going to be more.

JEFF: *Do you feel that there will always be a need for something like that?*

FRANK: I sure hope so, just to shake

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"The MPAA affects every stage of the game."

'em up when they need shaking up. I see it coming back and going away and coming back and going away, I see no predictable schedule. All of a sudden you could have three in a month, and then you wouldn't see it for a year. Because it is a *political* organ, and it is done from a very *particular* point of view. One of the first rules we made was that you couldn't contribute if you were an editor or a publisher, so that it would be *our* playground.

What *amazed* me was the virulence of the response to it from one corner, and the general acceptance of it everywhere else. THE COMICS JOURNAL went berserk, but Marvel and DC and the rest seemed to accept it. "Oh, we probably ought to read this." *(Laughter.)* We got a lot of subscriptions from the companies.

JEFF: *Did you feel that it was basically just them feeling that you were infringing on their territory, their territorial rights?*

FRANK: One can only guess. All I know is that Fantagraphics was the only publisher who thought that the freelancers shouldn't have their own newsletter, however they happened to package their comments.

JEFF: *I'm surprised that no one has picked up the slack in the interim time that you guys haven't been able to produce. Has no one volunteered to try to put a WAP together, or something like WAP?*

FRANK: There's talk, but freelancers tend to work a lot, so it always takes awhile to get things out of people. The goal is that the flurries of intense activity will result in issues of WAP, whoever the parties involved are. I'm glad that the organ exists because I can see that the next censorship fight isn't far away.

JEFF: *Really?*

FRANK: Yeah, I see it coming. The music industry just caved in. And in comics there's already more talk of labels or ratings or whatever the latest euphemism is. **Buddy Saunders** is writing letters again. There's those very *curious* discussions of "violence in comics" that turn up an awful lot now. The groundwork's being laid. The ratings flank is probably smelling blood right about now, so there's going to be another fight.

JEFF: *You're probably right.*

FRANK: Yeah. The hardest thing to get across now is what *appalls* me the most, is the utter facetiousness of the argument that it's just labelling, it's just putting a name on something, it's just letting people know what's *in* it. I've done a movie now, without ever having been to the MPAA. I see its power, its *censorious* power. It affects things at every stage of the game. When you get an idea for a movie that's half a paragraph *long*, they're ready to put a rating on it. "Are you going for a hard R on this?" And you see the effects.

Frank's only artwork of ROBOCOP (in its complete form).

JEFF: *Before it's even made.*

FRANK: Yeah. And like *any* censor organization, its rules are impossible to understand, but always subject to whatever the prevailing special interest group there is out there.

JEFF: *My assumption is that you guys went ahead with ROBOCOP 2 from stage one as an R-rated film.*

FRANK: Yep.

JEFF: *Do you know whether there are problems with getting an R, or are you in the right ball park for that?*

FRANK: Oh, I think we are, but what do I know? *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *I think the first film had to go through several cuts to get an R.*

FRANK: Seven, I hear.

JEFF: *And so far you've had none of the same problems?*

FRANK: It hasn't been submitted yet, so we'll see. We're still cutting away in the editing room.

JEFF: *Are there a couple of scenes where you're wondering how they'll respond?*

FRANK: Sure, but I try not to think about it. They're my favorite scenes. *(Laughter.)*

"We didn't want HOWARD THE DUCK.

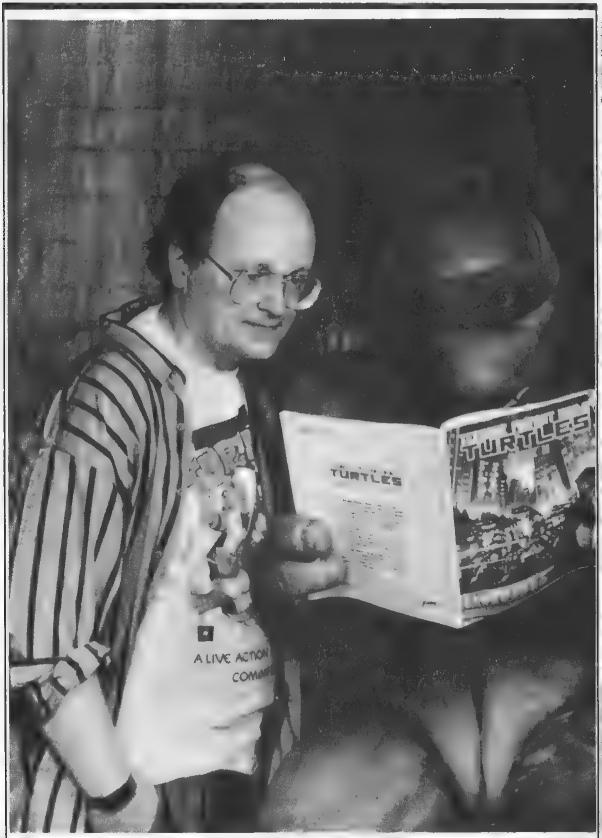


Photo: Alan Mansfield

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES all artwork accompanying this interview TM & © 1990 Mirage Studios. All photos ©1990 Northshore Investments Ltd. unless otherwise noted

That's been kind of a rallying cry for us."

PETER LAIRD

Congratulations, Peter and Kevin. You may not realize it, but you've become one of the most significant forces in the comic-book industry and artform of the 1990s.

Sometimes we're too close to an event to recognize its significance. Such is the case — for everyone right now, I think — with the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES phenomenon. As comics readers, fans and/or professionals, we're still too close to the memory of the inauspicious beginnings with the odd-ball, oversized black-and-white TMNT #1. That was just six years ago, and during that span of time the Turtles spawned, fueled and survived the notorious black-and-white glut (which some wrongfully blame them for), gave birth to an animated cartoon series and toy marketing and merchandising bonanza (which many still envy and resent), and allowed Mirage Studios' creative core to grow from just Peter and Kevin to an intimate circle of seven creators working in the studio proper, and at least a dozen associate creators contributing to the mythos.

Lo and behold, they've even weathered the Hollywood treatment. TMNT: THE MOVIE is remarkably true to the spirit and specifics of the original black-and-white Turtles. If ever a transition from comics page to celluloid seemed dubious, the Turtles certainly seemed doomed: cartoony, anthropomorphic Turtles interacting with live actors in atmospheric settings in what has to be both a send-up of the martial arts films and a valid action-comedy in and of itself? Impossible . . . but there it is, and the damned thing works without betraying its source. The movie is a rare achievement, indeed, and has quickly made box-office and independent film history.

The flip side of the argument is that the Turtles are undoing recent efforts to make the American public accept the comics medium as an artform, not a form of children's literature, and a valid vehicle for adult, *as well as adolescent,*

"Before the cartoon show New World wanted

material. Like last year's Batman hoopla, it is being argued, the Turtles are reasserting the juvenilization of the medium, reinforcing the public view that comics are "just for kids." However, the subtext of such an argument is that only adult comics should be brought to the public's attention, which is patently absurd: in a healthy environment, the comics medium should spawn works that address many interests and age groups.

All well and good. But the reason I consider Peter and Kevin's accomplishments such a seminal moment in American comics is because they've anchored the decade we've just stepped into with a potent alternative to doing business with the corporate-owned New York publishing houses, or the new corporate bases established by Disney on the West Coast, and Valiant in the Big Apple.

For creators, a few alternative role models did exist prior to now — Will Eisner's SPIRIT, Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman's MAUS — but even Crumb remains identified with a subcultural, rather than popular culture, name of influences and affluences. Silly as they may seem to many, the Turtles have touched the masses to a deeper extent, from the children (the first generation of kids to have comic-book characters they could claim as their own since the early 1960s) to the corporate fatcats and money men, who are tripping over themselves to grasp the phenomenon — either as participants, or as imitators. Significantly, they still have to come back to Peter and Kevin to do so; Peter and Kevin have not only retained the ownership of their creation, they've weathered the ride with integrity intact. Mirage Studios has become a creative and business force to be reckoned with, and it can be convincingly argued that they alone (in partnership with agent Mark Freedman) could have helmed their success; if they had, indeed, sold the Turtles to DC or Marvel, the parent corporation would have ignored the characters' potential, fixed as they are on exploiting and merchandising only their established, wholly company-owned creations.

Mirage's success is the clearest signal to the comic art community in years: you can do it. *And I'm not talking about emulating the material success, which is a valid barometer of their impact, but not the be all and end all (as Dave Sim and Bill Watterson have demonstrated with their respective creations which they refuse to license or merchandise; to each his own, and more power to them — the correct application of creator rights is that the creators must determine their own path).*

Those who aspire to only their material and monetary success have missed the point entirely; with potentially greater consequences than the underground movement of the '60s and '70s, self-publishing and all its implications is not only valid, it may be necessary if the industry and artform is to survive and mature in the 1990s.

In a way, the battle lines have been drawn because, unlike the undergrounds, Mirage has made its influence and impact felt in the same arena DC and Marvel have dominated for over three decades. *If Peter, Kevin and all the Mirage creators are able to mature in the coming years without Mirage becoming another Frankensteinian publishing and merchandising firm, they will be one of the most positive forces for the industry and artform.*

Trying to corral Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman prior to the opening of the

Photo: Alan Markfield

to do a sleazy, quick and dirty version."

Photo: Alan Mayhew

movie — I don't need to tell you which *movie, do I? — was next to impossible. But I managed to nail Peter down, along with Steve Lavigne, Mike Dooney and Eric Talbot of the Mirage Studios creators, the week before the movie opened nationally. We talked about the genesis and making of the film among other things . . .*

STEPHEN BISSETTE: *You all worked on the Mirage movie adaptation, right?*
MICHAEL DOONEY: I didn't.
PETER LAIRD: Jim pencilled, Eric inked backgrounds, **Steve Lavigne** colored it.
MIKE: I stayed out of it because I wanted my friends to make all the money.
STEVE LAVIGNE: Mike's so good to us!
PETER: He's so benevolent and kind, so self-effacing.
MIKE: They all have families and stuff, except for Eric, who's just having a rough time.
STEPHEN: *How long did it take to finish?*
PETER: Full tilt, about two months.
STEPHEN: *Well, are you guys happy with the movie comic?*
PETER and MIKE: Yeah! Very, yeah.
STEVE: It looks great. We haven't seen it, though.
MIKE: Be positive, you should probably say you *have* seen it.
STEVE: Oh, uh *(loud voice)* it's great! We love the ending! *(Laughter.)* Archie did wonderful things with it . . .
MIKE: Except for all the bleeds —
STEVE: Oh, yeah, all the bleeds didn't come out, though.
MIKE: Kevin designed it to bleed all over the place.
STEPHEN: *And they couldn't do it?*
STEVE: They just didn't understand bleeds!
STEPHEN (incredulous)*: Archie Comics didn't understand* bleeds?
STEVE: *(Laughter.)* "It's impossible, guys, you can't do that. Can't be done. Can't do that . . ."
STEPHEN: *But it was full painted color, right?*
PETER: They did two versions.
STEVE: Yeah, they did the deluxe, painted one, and the **Barry Grossman** colored one, working from line art. He waited until I was done painting pages, so he could base his on mine.
PETER: Well, he colored the whole book in a weekend, too. *(Laughter.)*
STEPHEN: *Well, it's easier with the flat color, right? Turtles are green . . .*
STEVE: . . . backgrounds are yellow, sky blue . . .
MIKE: If the Turtles are too small, they're red! *(Laughter.)*
STEPHEN: *It must have felt weird, adapting an adaptation of work you'd already done years ago.*
PETER: Yeah, it was. There were a lot of scenes that were *deja vu*. The origin story and a lot of that, the plot elements are very similar . . . it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it.
STEPHEN: *Did you show Shredder getting shredded in the garbage truck?* (Laughter.)
PETER: No, in fact, we don't even see him land in the garbage truck —
STEPHEN: *Oh, so it's a* tasteful *comic.*
PETER: *Very* tasteful, Steve.
STEVE: Except for the big blood splatter — SPLOOT!
STEPHEN (quoting BLOOD FEAST)*: "A fit end for the human garbage he was!"*
STEVE *(quoting Splinter):* "Your death

"We didn't think it was going to be a major movie."

will be. . . without honor." "Wah, not the garbage truuccckkkkk!"

STEPHEN: *All right, what about the parody comic?*

ERIC TALBOT: It's excellent!

PETER: **Mark Martin** is doing it all by himself.

STEPHEN: *From what I've seen, it's pretty ruthless.*

PETER: It is, it's great!

STEPHEN: *That's pretty rare, for a company to say to an artist, "Go ahead, make complete fun of us, tear us apart."*

So what gives?

PETER: Well, it's **Mark Martin,** cutting loose with his wacky satirical talents. We didn't want to restrain him at all on this.

ALL: He's a genius!

STEVE: He's downright a genius! *(Laughter.)*

PETER: He's having a lot of fun with it, too.

STEPHEN: *Back to your movie comic: Did you have any models of a prior movie comic in mind; ones you thought really worked? There have been tons of comics based on movies.*

PETER: Yeah, but very few good ones. ALIEN.

MIKE *(sarcastic)*: OUTLAND. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: Actually, ALIEN is the only one I can think of. Most of the movie adaptations are pretty shitty.

STEVE: The BATMAN movie!

PETER: Ah, that was horrible.

MIKE *(sarcastic, as always,)*: **Howie Chaykin's** STAR WARS!

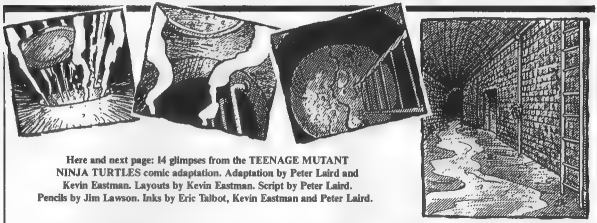
STEPHEN: *Let's jump to movies: There*

Poster art for TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES circa 1984.

"Your death will be . . . without honor."

Photo: Alan Markfield

"They wanted famous comedians dressed as



Here and next page: 14 glimpses from the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES comic adaptation. Adaptation by Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman. Layouts by Kevin Eastman. Script by Peter Laird. Pencils by Jim Lawson. Inks by Eric Talbot, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird.

have been lots of movies based on comic-book characters. You must have had plenty of fears, given what they usually do with comic-book characters.

ERIC: Yeah, like SWAMP THING. *(Laughter.)*

STEPHEN: *AAAAAAAAAAAGH!*

STEVE: HOWARD THE DUCK!

PETER: Well, the first thing we said to **Tom Gray,** who was the head of production, was that we didn't want it to be HOWARD THE DUCK. That's been kind of a rally cry for us.

STEVE: Not HOWARD! Anything but HOWARD!

PETER: It *didn't* become like HOWARD, thank God. That movie was a mistake from the word go.

STEPHEN: *Were there any models for what you* wanted *it to be like?*

PETER: I really liked the first SUPERMAN movie. I thought that was a reasonably faithful adaptation with appropriate changes.

MIKE: Actually, I think early on I remember Pete saying that he would be happy if it was as good as the first SWAMP THING movie, because in the beginning we didn't think it was going to be a major movie.

PETER: That's true, that was before **Jim Henson** got it.

MIKE: The budget went from, what? Two million, on up from there . . .

STEPHEN: *Ah, so they were going to do a low, low budget movie?*

STEVE: Yeah.

STEPHEN: *Get Billy Munns (make-up man on the first SWAMP THING) to do the Turtles.* (Laughter.)

PETER: Well, that's what **Tom Gray** first suggested, that it be done in Hong Kong for two million dollars. In fact, they were going to construct most of the sets over there, do some location shooting in New York, but do almost all the interiors in Hong Kong.

STEPHEN: *So that's where it started. When did you first hear from them? When was the first inkling that there might be a movie?*

PETER: Actually, a *long* time ago we got a letter — I suspect in '85, maybe even '84 — before the cartoon show, from New World Pictures, who wanted to do a sleazy, quick and dirty version of the Turtles. Lots of nudity, guns and stuff.

MIKE: *Really?*

PETER: Yeah. We said, "No, thanks." I still have the letter somewhere.

STEVE: "Starring **Sybil Danning!**" Aren't those guys doing RENEGADE SKATING NUNS or something now? *(Laughter.)*

STEPHEN: *That was before the cartoons.*

PETER: Yeah, well before any of the licensing happened. While it was interesting to get that letter, and see they were interested, it was clear that we could wait. It wasn't like we were desperate for the money. It just sounded like it would have been a real shitty thing to do with the characters. I'm glad we did wait.

STEPHEN: *Well, you* know *you can trust the guys who do RENEGADE NUNS. That puts you a few notches up on Marvel, who sold all their characters to New World or Cannon.*

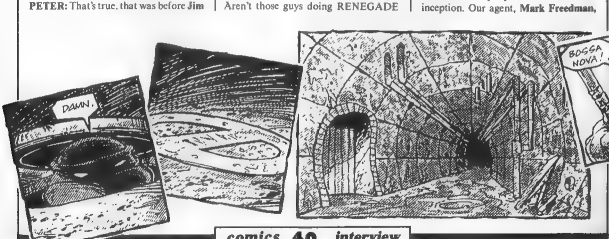
STEVE: You know you'll get high distribution with those guys.

STEPHEN: *Instantly put into the four drive-ins left in the country.* (Laughter.) *So what was next? After the cartoons there was more interest?*

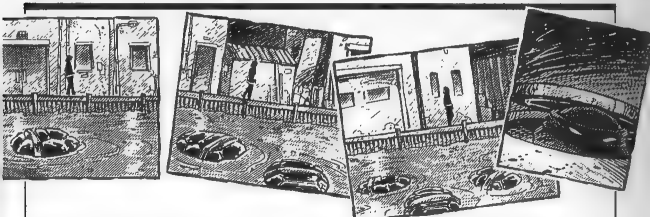
PETER: It wasn't much over a year and a half ago that we started seriously talking about it. Actually, it was only about a year ago . . . a little over a year.

STEPHEN: *It came together* that *quickly?*

PETER: I'd say a year and a half from inception. Our agent, **Mark Freedman,**



Turtles with their faces showing — painted green."



had been talking with some guys, **Kim Dawson** and **Gary Proctor,** maybe . . . I'm not sure, I can't recall the names, exactly. They're listed on the movie as producers. They had heard of the Turtles and they wanted **Gallagher,** the comedian, to be in the movie. I guess **Gallagher** was into the idea, they got in touch with Mark, and talks started that way. I went through a bunch of different stages: at one point, the idea of having famous comedians dressed as the Turtles, but with their own faces showing through the Turtle heads — *(Laughter and groaning)* — painted green. **Billy Crystal, Howie Mandel.** We were lucky that idea got deep-sixed *real* quick. Those were the names being thrown around, but that was obviously real stupid, so Kevin and I nixed that.

STEPHEN: *So you had veto power every step of the way?*

PETER: Well . . . to an extent. Things like that, not only was it clear we didn't want it to happen that way, Mark also — that avenue wasn't looked at too carefully. It was so clearly *not* what should be done that it was just discarded. ¶

ERIC: Shredder could be played by **John Candy . . .**

MIKE: John Candy could play *three* of 'em! *(Laughter.)* No, he was going to play Splinter. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: In terms of the actual movie that got made, we had approval on the Turtles, April, Casey, the Shredder, Splinter, and we had approval over the treatment and the screenplay.

STEPHEN: *First draft, or final?*

PETER: Final.

STEPHEN: *Great! Did you and Kevin have a role equal to Mark's in the negotiations?*

PETER: It was split up the way it usually is: Mark handled the business end of it, negotiating all the points of the percentages and so forth, and Kevin and I worked on the creative end with director **Steve Barron** and **Bobby Herbeck,** who was the first writer they brought in.

STEPHEN: *Was there a director named before Barron?*

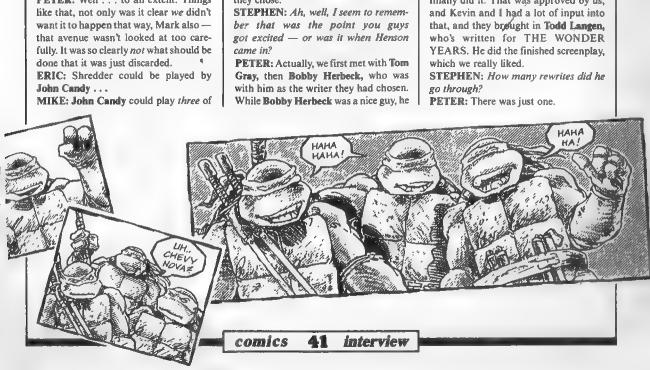
PETER: No, he was the first one that they chose.

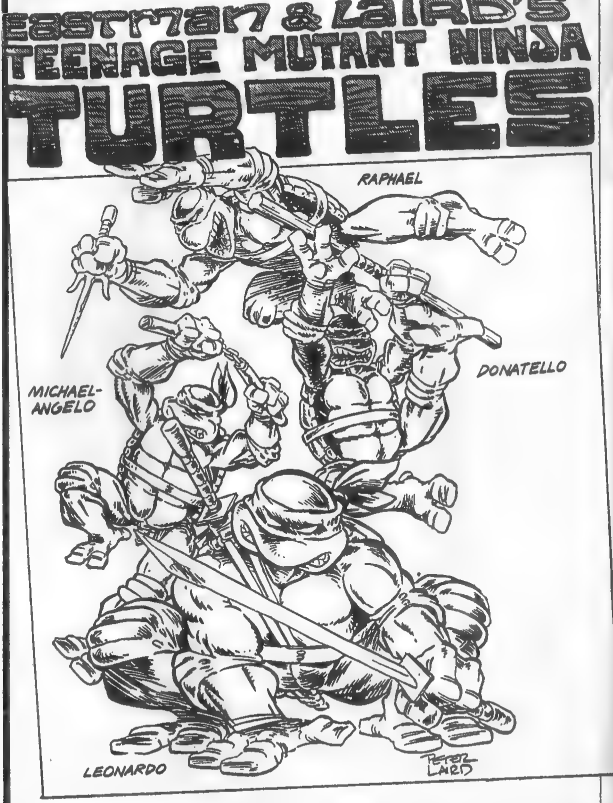
STEPHEN: *Ah, well, I seem to remember that was the point you guys got excited — or was it when Henson came in?*

PETER: Actually, we first met with **Tom Gray,** then **Bobby Herbeck,** who was with him as the writer they had chosen. While **Bobby Herbeck** was a nice guy, he — he just *didn't* have the feel for the Turtles. He was a sitcom writer, and he was having them doing really stupid things, things that just didn't fit in with the whole story of the Turtles. So we were getting a little depressed about whoever was going to direct the movie being able to find the direction that it should go in. Then **Steve Barron** was brought in. We met him, and from the first time we met him, we were really confident that it was going places. He was real hot to include a lot of stuff from the books, he read the collection we put out, had marked different places in the book: scenes he thought would be appropriate to put in the movie. That was great, because he really showed us that he was seriously interested in doing something that hewed closely to our original vision. He ended up working hard with **Bobby Herbeck** trying to work out a treatment, and they finally did it. That was approved by us, and Kevin and I had a lot of input into that, and they brought in **Todd Langen,** who's written for THE WONDER YEARS. He did the finished screenplay, which we really liked.

STEPHEN: *How many rewrites did he go through?*

PETER: There was just one.





From the hand of Peter Laird, circa 1986, the whole gang!

"We had approval over the treatment and screenplay."

Photo: Alan Hatfield

STEPHEN: *Really!*

PETER: Yeah, and it was great. We accepted it right off the bat.

STEPHEN: *That is amazing, given what most films — less problematic films than the TURTLES — go through.*

PETER: It is! Somewhere in there, we got the news that **Henson** had been enlisted.

STEPHEN: *Did Barron bring him in? They had worked together on the TV show THE STORYTELLER.*

PETER: That was the connection that made it possible. They had worked together, and **Henson** just at that time had a space in which he could do some work.

STEPHEN: *When did you first see some of Henson's work on your characters? That must have been a shot in the head . . .*

PETER: That was in the spring of '89, I think. They sent us some videotape of sculptors from the Creature Shop. Actually, the first thing they sent us were photos of the Turtles sculptures they were trying out, the different way they were trying to sculpt the Turtles. Then they sent us the videotape of some of the stunt people trying out the bits and pieces of the Turtles costumes. They were all cast in this light blue foam rubber, and they were trying them on . . .

MIKE: I was up here when the videotapes started coming, so it had to be after June. We were seeing the animatronic tests.

STEPHEN: *Yes, you moved up here from New Jersey then.*

MIKE: I remember us all sitting around the VCR here —

STEVE: — and every time someone came in, playing it for them. "Look! Look!" *(Laughter.)* Running over and standing there, watching it again, like you'd never seen it before.

ERIC: It was funny. I was mesmerized; I'd never seen anything like it!

PETER *(quoting line of dialogue from the test tapes):* "Michaelangelo, Michaelangelo, what are you doing?"

STEVE: They said it over and over! We got the tape of — I think it actually was **Dave Foreman**, who ended up playing Leonardo, trying on the bits of the Turtle costume, figuring out appropriate ways to walk and move in it . . . that tape had the outtakes of the stuntmen trying out the suits. That was a month or so before we got the tape of the articulated heads, which were also freshly cast, not painted, just the blue foam-rubber cast, but with all the mechanisms. They were trying them out, trying to see how the mouths could make the appropriate movements to match the words, and — *(Laughter.)* One of them, over and over, was going, "Michaelangelo? Where the heck is Michaelangelo? Michaelangelo?"

STEVE: The eyebrow going up —

PETER: That looked awesome. And they also had that one on the baby Turtle, and the Splinter head.

STEVE: Didn't they also have the baby Splinter, practicing karate?

PETER: Yeah, they did, they showed him moving around. He was a puppet . . . that stuff was great. That really got us excited.

STEPHEN: *What kind of approval did you have over the sculpture?*

PETER: If we had seen that stuff and said, "This *sucks*," I'm sure we could have stopped them at that point. But luckily, it was one of those things where everything went well, and we didn't have to.

MIKE: Wasn't it, like, nobody had seen anything about the Shredder until we actually went down to North Carolina where the film was shot?

PETER: That's true, that was one thing I wasn't really crazy about. It wasn't until **Steve Lavigne** and I actually drove down, and we were the first ones to see photos of the Shredder costume. I must say, I was immediately *not* taken with it. It looked too gaudy.

STEPHEN: *Is that the one in the movie?*

PETER: Yeah.

STEPHEN: *You didn't see drawings?*

PETER: No.

STEPHEN: *Well, was that a character you were supposed to have approval over?*

PETER: Yes, we had approval over *all* the characters that were in the books originally. I wasn't really happy about that, and neither was Kevin — but as it turned out, it's grown on us. Now I like it a lot. I have to say, we saw still photos of it, of the guy in the costume . . .

STEVE: There was a really stupid one, of him standing on the hill.

PETER: Yeah, on a rock pile or something, but when you see it in the movie, with the lighting and so forth, and the way the actor moves, it looks really good.

We hadn't seen the fully painted Turtles' costumes until we went down there, and that — *that* just blew me away. To see how they'd painted them . . .

STEPHEN: *It must be amazing to see something you've drawn realized like that.*

PETER: The first time Steve and I walked into the Creature Shop . . . oh, we didn't walk in, it was locked, I think. Remember, there was that Turtle sitting in the chair . . .

STEVE: Sitting in that chair, just a suit, the empty suit!

PETER: Slumped in the chair, but it was all put together, it was really cool. It was amazing.

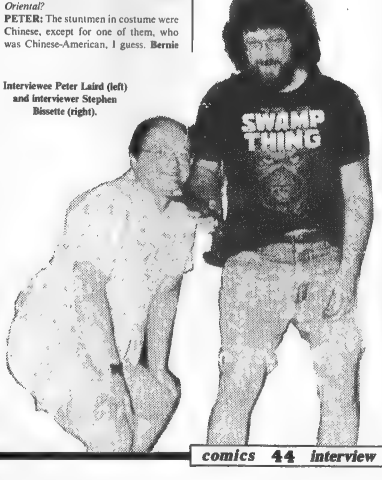
STEPHEN: *What else was in the Creature Shop?*

STEVE: It looked like a Turtle butcher shop. *(Laughter.)* Hundreds of arms and legs hung up all over the place, heads and stuff, all the animatronic headsets, little pedestals they set them on so they could

"It looked like a Turtle butcher shop."

work on the motors and stuff right there.
STEPHEN: *How many heads did they have?*
STEVE: They only had four animatronic heads, didn't they? And then they had other heads, stunt heads they'd wear when they were in motion and for far shots, you know . . . but the back room was really funky, because it did have arms and legs all along the wall, and then they had a drying room, where they dried the suits. The guys would *sweat* so much in the suits, they had to dry out the suits for a few hours.
STEPHEN: *Mmmmm, must have smelled real good . . .*
STEVE: I wouldn't want to slip one of those on afterwards!
PETER: They had the Splinter puppet in different pieces, the head with the shoulder, and then the arms that had mechanisms; you'd pull these levers to move them.
STEPHEN: *You showed me videotapes of the stunt from the end of the film, where Splinter caught the knives. There was a fellow under the puppet, really catching thrown knives.*
PETER: Yeah, they were crazy!
STEPHEN: *So were the turtle-actors Oriental?*
PETER: The stuntmen in costume were Chinese, except for one of them, who was Chinese-American, I guess. **Bernie Ray, Jr.** — he was Buck Rogers' sidekick in the TV show.
STEVE: He was also in RED SONJA. He played Donatello in the TURTLES.
PETER: I didn't know until I read the preview magazine that there were actually *three* sets of Turtles suits, the stunt Turtles, which were the basic costumes with no articulation, which looked just like the *acting* costumes, except the acting ones had all the mechanisms for the face motion — all radio-controlled from servos and battery packs hidden *inside* the shell. Then there was a third set of costumes which were even lighter, and less articulated and detailed, used for long shots where the Turtles had to jump around and so forth, allowing more freedom of movement.

The "acting" Turtles were amazing. We saw them on the set with the backpacks, with the outer shell *off*, so you could see all the machinery inside. When they were actually working, performing, they looked so *real*, the way they moved.



Interviewer Peter Laird (left) and interviewer Stephen Bissette (right).

For each acting Turtle there was a puppeteer who would control the eyes and mouth and eyebrow movements. He had two hand controls that had five individual finger switches, plus wrist motion controls . . . you could get a lot of control that way. Plus they wore these headsets that had these curving rods, four rods, going around in front of their faces with light sensors on them that would pick up movements of the operator's face and transmit them to the Turtle head.
STEPHEN: *And the hand controls were for?*
STEVE: They had specific movements, where the headsets were more flexible, for talking, while the hand controls, they would just press a button and they would *smile* or whatever
PETER: They also had a computer setup where they could run through a sequence, a specific sequence and record it on the computer and just play it back; sort of program a performance.
STEPHEN: *And then they had the pizza-eating heads.*
PETER: *(Laughter.)* No, just appropriate cutting . . . It does look great on the screen, because they have tongues that work and everything.
STEVE: Their teeth were soooo big, out of foam rubber . . . but they worked, all painted up; they did look like *teeth* . . .
STEPHEN: *So you're still satisfied: those are your drawings up on the screen?*
PETER: Oh, completely.
STEPHEN: *Are they going to affect how you draw the Turtles now? Has the movie altered how any of you see or draw the Turtles?*
PETER: I think it has in some way, I've seen bits and pieces of 'em in what **Jim Lawson** has drawn, and Mike. Actually, I was just inking some dinosaurs for Mike in a Turtles story he's doing, and I was looking at the way he's drawing the shells, and I think they've been influenced by the movie —
MIKE: I drew shells like that before the movie, Goddamn it! *(Laughter.)*
PETER: Come on, Mike.
STEPHEN: *Well, everyone draws the shells differently.*
MIKE: Look at issue thirteen, Goddamn it! *(Laughter.)* Pre-movie! You, you owe me money now! *(Laughter.)* You billionaire! You billionaire shell-stealing bastard! *(Laughter.)*
STEPHEN: *So Peter thinks it's had an influence, anyway!*
PETER: The way **Jim Lawson** drew the Turtles over the last two years sure has

"I was amazed how close they kept to the Turtles' look."

affected the way *I* draw them. It's a cross-pollination thing.

STEPHEN: *Well, I recognize that. But it was always coming from inside the Studio, this is from outside.*

PETER: The great thing is the sculptors in London kept to — I was amazed how close they kept to the look of the Turtles from the books. That's one of the reasons I'm so happy. To me, at least, it was so close it made no difference, the subtle changes they had made.

STEVE: I think the only *real* differences were the headbands being different colors, and the eyes, and they're *thicker* —

MIKE: Well, I think our Turtles have gotten thicker and thicker, bulkier over the years — especially Eric's Turtles, with the surgical implant shoulder pads . . .

STEPHEN: *Talbot Turtles!*

PETER: I kind of look at them as what's *between* the original Turtles and what the Turtles look like now in the books. The movie Turtles have really defined muscles, especially their upper arm muscles and shoulder muscles, their thigh muscles, they're really bulked up considerably.

STEPHEN: *I've only seen the film once; how striking, on repeated viewing, is the characterization of them as individuals? In voice and mannerism, they read as individuals; I'm just talking physically.*

PETER: You mean in the sculpting and so forth? Each Turtle was literally sculpted differently, each Turtle shell had a different pattern, and they were each painted differently. They each have a slightly different color scheme.

MIKE: Remember when we saw the heads, in the Creature shop, the Raphael head had scars, all scars —

PETER: Yes, you can see that in the movie, too, if you look closely. There's one scene where Splinter is counseling Raphael; the camera really comes in and you can see this scar on Raphael's nose. They really did try to make the Turtles look different. Michaelangelo has a more rounded face. Raphael's is flatter and pointier. Donatello is kind of — not a block head, but bigger.

STEVE: It's that giant Turtle brain!

PETER: Probably Leonardo looks the closest to the epitome of the perfect Turtle.

STEPHEN: *Any favorite character in the movie?*

STEVE and MIKE: Danny. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: You sacs!

MIKE: I like "Thug #1." *(Laughter.)* No, the Foot Soldier who let me cut into line at the commissary! *(Laughter.)*

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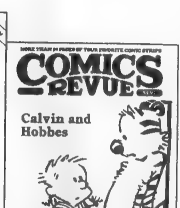

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"I think I write a damned entertaining strip."

Dan Barry, on the French Riviera — June, 1958.

Having traveled the world and lived in France, Austria, England and Italy, to name a few, Dan Barry now resides not far from the Cabbage Patch Kids king, Xavier Roberts, in Cleveland, Georgia — just a piece down the road from our Screamer Mountain fortress of solitude, in the general neighborhood of where DELIVERANCE, THE LONG RIDERS and many other movies have been filmed.

Rick Norwood, editor of COMICS INTERVIEW's companion magazine COMICS REVUE, accompanied publisher David Anthony Kraft and marketing manager Julia Mather to Dan's home for this interview. Gail Beckett, who letters FLASH GORDON and sometimes colors the Sunday strips, joined us.

Dan's eye for detail shows in the interior design of his home, his fine art placed articulately, with wonderful carved work everywhere (woodworking is a hobby of Dan's) around the living area. Tones of smoky turquoise and shades of sea green bring the Mediterranean to mind, and earlier years spent in Capri and on the Riviera . . .

In this second part, Dan ruminates on his days of dealing with Edgar Rice Burroughs while drawing the TARZAN strip, on FLASH GORDON, and — yes! on secrets of Gil Kane, plus much more . . .

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT: *Did you really work for Mort Weisinger?*

DAN BARRY: Yeah, and he did not dump on me.

DAK: *You must be the only one.*

RICK NORWOOD: *He tortured poor*

DAN BARRY

All artwork accompanying this interview ©1989 King Features Syndicate, unless otherwise noted.

"I was ashamed of being a comics artist."

HI, RAY! WHERE'S KENT AND MARLA?
FLASH! YOU'RE BACK!... BOY— AM I GLAD!
WHY?—IS SOMETHING WRONG?
I'LL SAY! MARLA HAS GOT KENT WALKING AROUND WITH STARS IN HIS EYES! HE'S BEEN MAKING THINGS FOR HER WITH THE CORNUCOPIAK!
THE CORNUCOPIAK! ... AIEE THAT WON'T
LAST I SAW, THEY WERE HEADING OUT THAT WAY— WHERE THAT BLACK SMOKE IS COMING FROM!
...YOU THINK ALL THAT SMOKE IS BEING CAUSED BY KENT?
...HE WAS WARNED NOT TO USE THE CORNUCOPIAK TO EXCESS!
I'LL BE DARNED! WHAT'S HE BUILDING—A CASTLE?
STAY HERE, RAY!
FLASH! FLASH! GET BACK! THAT THING — IT'S OUT OF CONTROL!

Dan Barry's Dec. 16 & 17 dailies from FLASH GORDON, '52.

Nelson Bridwell.

DAN: And what he did to **Meskin**, he actually caused a breakdown, he actually destroyed that man.

DAK: *Why did he do that over comic books?*

DAN: Have you got an hour?

RICK: *You read the SUPERMAN stories he edited. He had a fat Superman, skinny Superman, old, bearded Superman, Superman being turned on and hated by the populace of Metropolis, suddenly loathed and hated — he was humiliating Superman, this is what he got off on.*

JULIA MATHER: *Isn't he the one who trained Jim Shooter?*

RICK: *I think that's true. Jim Shooter first went to work as a kid, just in his teens, and Mort Weisinger would go around to people and say, "Look, this teenage kid can write the pants off of you guys." I guess Shooter thinks that's how an editor should act, he's supposed to torture and humiliate his writers and artists, and really it was just Mort's aberration.*

DAN: It's strange, I never saw that side of Mort. The guy who was difficult, the guy who would snipe at me, was **Murray Boltinoff. Jack Schiff,** I understand from other people, had to be watched.

RICK: *Schiff was the sweetest man who ever lived.*

DAN: Yes, well, that's how I knew him. I was very ashamed of being a comics artist, and five years on the couch and I was still dealing with it. I had a psychoanalyst who was a marvelous character, and obviously very good because he's now like the **Freud** of the day — I mention **Silvano Arieti** to somebody who's studied medicine and they say, "What, you had *him!*" And he *admired* what I did. I couldn't get over it. Here was this Italian, raised in Italy, very cultured family, the whole thing, and he said, "You're entertaining people, think of yourself as **Charlie Chaplin.**" And I'd say, "I'm no **Charlie Chaplin.**" I guess that was the trouble, because what I was ashamed of was I was working for guys like **Stan Lee** and **Mort Weisinger**! Really!

DAK: *Well, how did you get from the Binders to DC?*

DAN: Well . . . Let me trace it. I worked for **Binder** for awhile, I got fired. **George Mandel** got drafted. **Alan Mandel** got all of his accounts and didn't know how to draw them. George was a very good friend of **Harry Sahle** — does that name mean anything to you? He's not too well known and remembered, but he was a glib, workmanlike cartoonist. He was good, he was better than I was at that point, and he was experienced — give him a script and he could do it, and do a pretty good job. And . . . **George Mandel's** main accounts were with Funnies, Inc., which was like a publisher but was really just an agent for publishers, they were a packager but they were a big cut above **Binder. Binder** packaged mostly artwork, whereas these Funnies, Inc. guys actually were surrogate publishers. They did books for Timely, in fact occasionally I did some CAPTAIN AMERICAs for them.

George's big character was Blue Bolt, and I used to love what George did with

"I knew Frazetta had the talent to do something big."

KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR THE SLIGHTEST TRACE OF PLANT LIFE, DALE!
IF THERE IS ANY, IT'S HIDDEN BY THESE TONS OF ICE!
Dan Barry
I IMAGINE SO! LUCKILY, WE BROUGHT OUR HEAT BLASTERS WITH US! LET'S SEE WHAT THIS UNCOVERS!
JUST AN ICY WALL... CLEAR THROUGH! BUT THERE'S A LARGER CAVERN ON THE OTHER SIDE! LET'S HAVE A LOOK!
Dan Barry
MAYBE WE'LL FIND SOMETHING GROWING IN THIS INNER CAVERN...
OH, FLASH! I-IT'S SO HOPELESS! THERE ISN'T EVEN A LIVING MICROBE ON THIS MOON!
WH...?! IT'S THAT SHADOW! THERE IS SOMETHING ALIVE IN THIS CAVE! GET BACK!
FLASH... COME BACK! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF HORRIBLE THING IT MIGHT BE!
Dan Barry
WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S LIVING! AND THAT MEANS THERE'S FOOD NEARBY!

FLASH GORDON, 3/19-20/52.

that character. George was the first guy ever to do the comic book within the comic book, where the character climbs out of the page, and **Eisner** used that later. George was a very creative guy, and his anatomy was very stylized but I thought it was very good, a lot better than **Jack Kirby** gave him credit for.

Well, Alan used **Harry Sahle** as penciller. Harry assumed Alan knew how to draw. *(Laughter.)* But Alan couldn't draw and Harry's pencils were too loose for him. Alan brought in a job and **FitzSimmons,** the editor at Funnies, knew it was subpar. So George (now in the Army) said, "Get in touch with Dan." "But Dan isn't ready." I wasn't. "Get in touch with Dan before you lose your fucking job and you're back in the garment industry where you belong." *(Laughter.)*

So Alan called me. I was delighted and I was scared. I had done bits, I had done panels, I'd looked at **Kirby,** I'd looked at **Meskin** — but *now* I get a *story,* cops are

Interesting panel from Flash Gordon's 11/1/52 episode.

"They put me with this cocky Irishman who was gone all

"MIDNIGHT MONDAY. NASTY, RAINY... THE NIGHT CHARGED WITH TEMPER. THAT'S WHEN IT STARTED. WHERE? THE BOWERY... SURE, LAUGH AT IT IF YOU WANT - OR SNEER MAYBE - BUT DOWN THERE ARE MY KIND OF PEOPLE. THEY DON'T HAVE MUCH - BUT THEY DON'T WANT MUCH EITHER."
TATTOO PARLOR
MASONIC

From **MIKE HAMMER** strip by **Ed Robbins**

running down the street, something's happening, and I'm thinking, "How do you do that!" So, I started pencilling. I went home and I actually cried the first week, I was desperate. Then Alan brought it in and **FitzSimmons** loved it. He said, "Now you're on the right track, Alan." It was signed **Alan Mandel,** okay. And Alan was taking 60 percent. It wasn't fair, but he had a wife and kids, I was single, you give in to this crap. *(Laughter.)* It went on for awhile and then I got married, and my wife was a real acquisitive, driving lady, you know like **Lincoln's** *(Laughter.)*

There wasn't a day that went by that she didn't praise Alan and then say something very negative. So, I'd go into work grumbling. I used to go in whistling, but now I was mad. She actually suggested I go out and stab him in the back, go to the publishers and get the accounts away from him. Instead, I finally insisted on equal billing — one strip we signed **Mandel & Barry,** the other one we signed **Barry & Mandel.** Then it got to be two Jewish wives at war. *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *That sounds like a movie.*

DAN: Anyway, in the end — I've always regretted it — in the end I just quit. I *knew* that I might just as well have gone up to **FitzSimmons** and said, "I want the account." They called me in. I got 50 percent finally. Pencillers usually got 60% — but I felt, he *got* the damn job or I'd still be working for **Binder.** He gave me the opportunity to learn how to draw, you know, and I was learning fast. The war was on, I was going to be drafted. I joined the enlisted reserve and there was a radio school — oddly enough it was right next door to Funnies, Inc. — and if you went to this radio school you were deferred for nine months. So I went.

Anyway, after I left Alan, he lost all of the accounts, every bloody account. They didn't like his inking. I felt really sorry. Well, Alan wound up back in the garment industry making more money than he ever would have as an artist. He was a qualified airplane mechanic, that's how he got deferred, and I think he went back to that. But I never felt well about leaving him like that. I always felt that I had actually gone out and done him in.

The positive thing that came out of going to work for Funnies, Inc. was I met **Johnny Giunta,** who became a lifelong friend until he died prematurely. A tragic guy but a beautiful guy whom I loved. Deeply. Inadvertently, I did a wonderful thing for him, because Johnny, like **Mort Meskin,** had a personality problem. He was extremely timid. Raised by a widowed Italian mother with a Madonna complex, he was *terrified* of women — you could imagine the kind of complexes this would set up in a guy. He was a wonderful artist and he was a pulp fan, and when I met him and saw his work I realized, "Oh oh, there's *another* stage way beyond me." John suggested I do some pulp magazines, and those were the days when **Virgil Finlay** was so popular. But I didn't feel qualified; and the money was awful.

Anyway, I was hired to do the pencils on BLUE BOLT, and they put me in an office with a writer, a handsome cocky Irishman who seemed to be out all of the time. Search parties were always out looking for him at the great bars around 45th Street — when he did show, he'd tell me about how he was going to be writing for movies, the big time. He was sure of it. He was my writer on BLUE BOLT. He was *good.* They paid him almost as much as the artists. He was the only one. He *was* Funnies, I realized that later. He was the reason they got all that work. He wrote everything! He'd sit down and five pages would come out of the typewriter like *that,* about an hour, and then he was out the door to go drinking. *(Laughter.)* And womanizing.

I can't believe the way he looks now. Okay. But he was *handsome* back then. **Robert Redford**, that type. He had the hook nose, but he had this golden hair and this glow, you know — an aura! And you met Mickey and you liked him, that's it. Years later, I was sharing a large studio, I came in one day and everybody was talking about this character in LIFE MAGAZINE, this book about a character called Mike Hammer, and I went over and looked and I said, "Holy sugah, that's **Mickey Spillane!** It can't be the same guy!" But it was Mickey. The guy who shared my office at Funnies, and wrote my first feature, BLUE BOLT.

RICK: *And those Hammer books were the best-selling paperback novels until PEYTON PLACE.*

DAN: Do you know what Mickey did the moment those things started to sell? He bought a big estate up in Woodstock. He called **Harry Sahle, Mike Roy** and me and a few other guys in comic books, and he said, "Come on up here and live with me. I'm building a house, we'll do comics and we'll publish." He built a house for each guy that went up and they had a colony — it was marvelous! I didn't go because I was married at that point, you know, but I regret not doing it, it might have been a great experience.

You know, he was writing THE HUMAN TORCH, the quarterly, all the stories for that title that had THE HUMAN TORCH as the lead story. That's what made **Goodman,** those things and CAPTAIN AMERICA. They just made him, they were an empire when **Stan Lee** was still in school. The way I found out was when I got into comics advertising . . . this thing that had always scared and awed me was, you know, how do you go about publishing, I found out the way you do it is you pick up the phone and call a printer. *(Laughter.)* But remember, I came from this isolated neighborhood where nobody even owned a car, and I was always in awe of people who could get something done. Everybody who I knew just had holes in their shoes and complained. People that could get something done were a marvel to me. But I found out then, when I tried to price printing, etc., they said, "Of course, you're talking about a minimum print order of 400,000." These were the days when that was a minimum print order! These guys were making *money!* At a dime an issue they were paying the artists $20 or $25 a page, and the biggest

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the time — they had guys looking for Mickey Spillane."

cost was printing.

RICK: *JOE PALOOKA printed a million copies. Now what's a good circulation — 100,000?*

DAK: *I think the average Marvel is probably around 250,000, and the DC books on average are 100,000 to 150,000.*

DAN: But they're, what, a dollar a book?

DAK: *Yeah. What happened with Spillane's publishing, did he ever do it? Did they ever bring any books out?*

DAN: They got as far as doing a MIKE HAMMER strip which never took off. He just couldn't split himself that way, these guys wound up partying, and they were really rather mediocre talents. **Mike Roy** was a likable French Canadian guy, he was one of these French Canadians who could speak neither English nor French. *(Laughter.)* I was always dreaming of living in France someday so I kept up with my high school French, so I could speak French adequately, so we went to an Alliance Francaise dance and the girls kept coming over to me to say, "What did he say, what language is that?" *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *Down in Louisiana once I remember a conversation between a Paritsian and a Cajun, neither could figure out what language the other was speaking. (Laughter.)*

DAN: I don't remember which one, Alphonse or Gaston, but one of them Mike looked like, with the little French moustache. And he was totally unaware

God blesses the mediocre sometimes that way, and they *are* blessed because they get the *most* out of life — totally unaware of his limitations. Happy go lucky. When that depression was going on he came to me looking for some work, so I took him on, and he was awful, I mean worse than he'd *ever* been. And, you know, how do you analyze your own style, I never even was aware that I had one until people said so. My theory is that every artist's style is created by his limitations, only that. You do it that way because you can't do it like **Caniff** and you can't do it like **Raymond** and you can't do it like **Foster** and you can't do it like **Disney** no matter how hard you try, and it comes out like you. That was my style.

I had a habit which hangs on even today of — someone once came over to me and said it very very . . . tried to say it tactfully, **Reed Crandall** — he said, "Your stuff is too rich." I didn't know what he meant, you know. I said, "Do you mean it's too good for comics?" And he said, "No." *(Laughter.)* I never felt the same way about Reed since that day, I used to like him an awful lot. But what happened is I would be shooting for something and couldn't get it, or just missed, so I'd *add* something instead of subtracting, and add and add and add.

RICK: *Nowadays you get artist who will do* millions *of little bitty fiddling details all around everywhere to hide the fact that in the middle is something they just don't know how to draw.*

DAN: Right, that's true.

JULIA: *And then the printers get it all off register. (Laughter.)*

DAN: By the time I got to do FLASH GORDON, that had somewhat become an asset. As I mentioned earlier, when they offered me FLASH I didn't feel good about it because science fiction was not my thing, so I went out and did a lot of research. What do you do with this damn strip that started in 1934, was a contemporary strip, and had gone off into fantasy and was now accepted as a space strip? King Features in its publicity couldn't write a decent blurb about what it was! And why the hell doesn't he marry Dale? You know, Pat Ryan had a *reason* for not marrying Normandy, she went

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"There are airheads who believe Flash Gordon is real."

and got married before he got a chance to. I did that with Dale, I got her engaged — you should have heard **Byck**! Finally, I decided to get them married. **Byck** vetoed it. Two years later the Phantom decides to get married and King spends a million dollars on publicity! They really had it in for me.

RICK: *And THE PHANTOM has taken off since then. You would watch it drop from paper after paper, but since the wedding and the birth of the twins, it's been picked up all over the place.*

DAN: But that isn't where the money comes from, it comes from Europe. It's the #1 strip in the world, it always was. I don't know why, but it always was. I mean, I don't understand **Lee Falk**'s writing. He's a very intelligent guy, he's involved with theater, he writes and acts and directs, and he *owns* a theater in Provincetown — but he writes THE PHANTOM for a level below a six-year-old! Somebody came over to me once and told me to tell **Lee Falk**, "We *know* Mr. Walker is the ghost who walks!" *(Laughter.)* Every single day, it doesn't matter how many times he uses the name. I sometimes think they must have the right idea. It's like DICK TRACY, "This is a wristwatch!" *(Laughter.)*

Did you know that at one time after I was divorced, I was kicking around New York, living in the Village — and it was hard as hell to turn the strip out, which was one of the reasons I was using all of these assistants — to get myself through therapy. And I had this advertising work so I still had commitments, and I had some other commitments to books, so I had all of these deadlines, so I sort of treated FLASH the way I did TARZAN when I agreed to help **Hogarth** on it. TARZAN, I would get the script and my brother Sy would come to my house after getting off work, and we'd sit down at about nine o'clock at night and at six o'clock the next morning the strips were ready. I was never proud of the artwork, it was pretty awful, but we were getting $100 a week to do it.

I hit a period when **Burroughs** decided to do one of his novels in the comics – in fact, he thought *all* of the strips should be just translating his novels — and he chose this thing TARZAN AT THE EARTH'S CORE. It had all of these long strange names, I had to go back to the book and read it to find out what he was talking about! You know, he would never say that this is that bird thing again, he'd call it whatever he called it and that meant whatever it was down in Pellucidar. And the dialogue was just ridiculous! There's a reason most writers who are *not* comics artists are *not* good comics writers.

RICK: *Especially if they came from the pulps and were used to getting paid by the word, because in comics the fewer words that go along with the picture are better than any massive block of description.*

DAN: A playwright would make a good comics writer — we're dealing with pictures. In the beginning I was trying so hard, I was going to really impress, I gave it to them by the pound. In the beginning I would overwrite, but I learned very quickly.

RICK: *Economy is everything.*

DAN: You turn off the picture if you leave no room to draw anything. **Stan Lee**, I couldn't get him to understand that. He just *didn't* understand why I didn't put in everything that he had written.

RICK: *Stan Lee wants two or three word balloons in every panel.*

GAIL BECKETT: Plus a caption that's about five lines long.

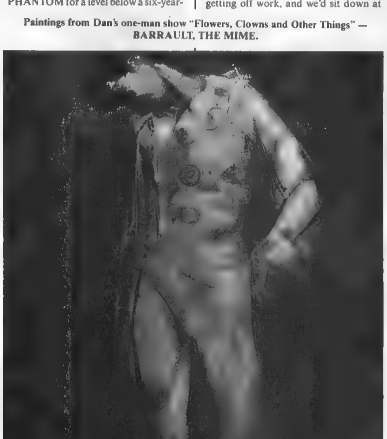
DAN: Yeah. In the script it's often necessary to over explain. Now, I'm totally flattered when you say you think that FLASH GORDON is the best science-fiction strip ever done, thank you. The reason is that I don't do science fiction.

RICK: *But I liked it when you did, and that was mostly when Harry Harrison was working with you on it, and Harry knows science fiction better than just about anybody alive.*

DAN: Yeah, but before that I did some, as well, on my own, and some of those stories in the period when Harry was working with me were my own. The gambling satellite was mine, it was all mine — in fact Harry hated it.

RICK: *I love that story.*

Paintings from Dan's one-man show "Flowers, Clowns and Other Things" — BARRAULT, THE MIME.



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"Hell, I'm gonna satirize *it* and condemn *it* (violence)."

Dan, with Lee "The Phantom" Falk at Dan's 20th Century West Gallery collection. Mr. Falk also brought us Mandrake the Magician.

DAN: But let me tell you why I avoid *real* science fiction in FLASH GORDON. When you write a science-fiction novel, or a science-fiction comic book, or a science fiction short story, you've got the reader. He's there, you've got him. You explain a premise, he understands it, and you carry it on throughout the rest of the story. In a daily strip you're always working with the assumption that the guy didn't buy the paper Monday and Tuesday and here it is, he's picking it up Wednesday. What you do in science fiction, of course, is to modify everything you know about a planet *down* to tolerable limits, to a point where perhaps it could be overcome. Then what I have done, what I have added to the strip, have done an awful lot with was to bring in the next threshold of possibility — way before the airheads like **Shirley MacLaine** got into this — *(Laughter.)*

RICK: *There are too many Shirley MacLaine airheads who believe this kind of stuff from STAR WARS, the force be with you and all this kind of stuff.*

DAN: Well, *I'm* not responsible for that. There are airheads who believe FLASH GORDON is *real.* I got feedback from when I was doing some of that kind of thing in the strip, but I also got a lot of the other kind. It was changing the nature of the strip.

RICK: *But it wasn't really changing the premise, because Alex Raymond was fantasy — but then you had been science fiction, basically nuts and bolts, for twenty years, and then all of a sudden you've got this mystic Martian guru —*

"I couldn't create a BEETLE BAILEY or

Dan Barry had help from Harvey Kurtzman on this episode of FLASH GORDON, 1952.

DAN: Okay, but what's wrong with going into another area! What's wrong with changing the strip? The trouble with doing a strip — from the point of view of my own amusement and sanity — is that necessity of keeping it recognizable to the readers. You know, the thing that **Falk** never seems to mind is doing the same story again and again and again and again and again. I know it's what people want, but they'll also get weary. **Bill Cosby,** everybody likes — I don't know why — but he'll be gone in a few years and something else will come along. Who remembers ALL IN THE FAMILY?

So, my feeling was that if I'm leaning that way, go with it. I did a thing in that particular sequence which I thought was *terrific*, and **Bob Fujitane**, who was then pencilling — the proof that it was terrific — is that he *violently* objected to it. *(Laughter.)* I had a thing which was a gang rape scene on Dale. Well, the implication —

RICK: *It must have been an awfully subtle implication because if Dale had been gang raped in the strip, I would remember it.*

DAN: No no no no. The implication of the way I handled the action is that Flash *seems* to be doing nothing, but he's turning their own violence against themselves. It was very violent. Well, these things happen. And it's not visually clear just — but you know what these guys are going to do when they pin her down — and then they *destroy* themselves! I remember a thing from a novel by a friend of mine, **Chester Himes,** who wrote COTTON COMES TO HARLEM. He was a black living in Europe and he was constantly satirizing the white view of blacks. COTTON COMES TO HARLEM was written in my house in Austria, he was my guest for about a month.

He had a scene where a guy comes riding by on a motorcycle and when he passed this truck with steel hanging out, the headless horseman emerges. I did this in the strip, *really* violent. And these things are happening! Violence has been raised to that kind of level on television and movies, I said, "Hell, I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna *satirize* it and *condemn* it for what it is." And Flash doesn't get involved, okay. That was my point! I mean, I would look at THE PHANTOM, look at **Stan Lee's** stuff, and the excessive purveyance of violence was something I was always queasy about —

RICK: *Norman Spinrad made a good point on violence when he said, "When violence comes into your life, afterwards the only thing you feel is embarrassment. You've just gotten in a fight and you're just sorry it happened." But in comics whoever wins must be the good guy, whoever loses must be the bad guy, as if good and evil were ever settled by a fist fight.*

DAN: Well, this is one of the things that I was ashamed of doing. I mean, how do you do superhero stuff? And I didn't have the talent to do comedy, obviously —

RICK: *I think you've got a lot of talent in comedy, and I think that would help the strip to —*

DAN: I use it whenever I can. What I meant was I couldn't create a BEETLE BAILEY or something like that, but I use comedy every day. My stuff has tongue-in-cheek stuff in it every day, it's very quiet. But the point is, I have always been straddling the fence. One of the reasons FLASH is not as popular as it *might* be is that I don't *ever*, hardly ever, use the sadistic stuff on Mongo. Did you read the *early* FLASH GORDON, the first year? Every week it was just another mangling, goring, physical sadistic —

RICK: *I don't think that's what strips have to sell. I think strips are popular when they've got suspense. In a comic book you can carry the fight through with some momentum, but breaking up a fight in a daily strip has no momentum.*

DAN: Well, THE PHANTOM does a lot with it.

RICK: *But strips work when there is suspense, when you* have *to read it the next day. It's suspense, not violence.*

DAN: Yes. When I first came to work —

something like that, but I use comedy every day."

this seems almost incredible — when I first came to work at King, we got to talking. **Sylvan Byck** and I, about **Alex Raymond's** stuff, RIP KIRBY. I said, "I think it stinks. It's the greatest artwork he's ever done, but the strip stinks." Sylvan was writing it! *(Laughter.)* I didn't know that. I think that's the reason it took me 20 *years* to get a raise. **Ward Greene** was writing it along with **Sylvan Byck**, and **Ward Greene** was a brilliant guy — wrote THE LADY AND THE TRAMP. **Ward Greene** hired me, he was the reason I finally said yes.

RICK: *It's strange because RIP KIRBY has these dreadful murder mysteries, but occasionally there will be a really good story.*

DAN: I never followed it. The one big hole in my morgue; I wish I had all of those RIP KIRBYs because every time I have to draw a loose figure of a guy walking, nobody could do that like **Raymond.** But the stories are terrible. I said, "Doesn't the guy who writes this *know* the *secret* of writing a mystery for comics? You can't do **Agatha Christie,** you can't do who-done-it, because it takes three months. They'll sit around for an hour to find out, but they're not going to sit around for three months." He said, "What do you mean, how else do you do a mystery?" "You *tell* them who's doing it in the *beginning!*" I couldn't believe that they'd never thought of that! And they've treated me so badly ever since! *(Laughter.)* They never knew that.

It was going more than a year at that point and they still were doing these terrible stories, but of course they sold a thousand newspapers because, you know, Alex had created a new strip. But they were starting to cancel. The readers were complaining, nobody was reading it except artists who were cutting it out for their morgues. Nobody else was reading it. Then they changed. I guess Sylvan decided to hire a writer or something — and I only learned later that Sylvan was writing it then.

DAK: *Well, I want to still jump back to*

An example of Alex Raymond's FLASH GORDON.

OH, DON'T YOU LOVE ME ANY MORE, FLASH?
WHY, I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU, GIRL!
LATE THAT NIGHT, AS FLASH TOSSES IN TROUBLED SLUMBER, THE WITCH QUEEN TEACHES DALE---OBEDIENCE!
NEXT WEEK: "WAR IN THE CAVES!"

"How do these guys keep their jobs? There

Alex Raymond monster gets a new story treatment (Dell Barras inked many of these).

the DC stuff. It sounds like you had some interesting times back there, when you finally got to DC. You said that you were maybe the only person that Mort Weisinger didn't give a hard time to.

RICK: *Well, you did some work for Julie Schwartz —*

DAN: I have a hard time with chronology, I don't remember my comic book experiences all that well. One of the reasons I never stayed on any big feature was that I just never trusted having my faith in any one publisher. I never became a DC man or whatever, you know. I never became a star at *any* of these places. For awhile **George Tuska** and I were sort of **Charlie Biro's** stars on CRIME DOES NOT PAY — the Mr. Coffee character that he called Mr. Crime, remember? *(Laughter.)* During that depression for some reason Charlie's books started to sell, **Lev Gleason's** books. Lev took Charlie and **Bob Wood** — Lev was a liberal, almost left wing, politically committed kind of guy who *lived* by his philosophy — and he *gave* them a share in the books. He said, "If you turn these books into something worthwhile, you will get as rich as I do." And he was as good as his word, they made a fortune.

It turned out to be **Bob Wood's** undoing, he became an alcoholic and all that, a very sordid thing. In fact he wound up involved in a drunken murder of a woman in a cellar apartment, it was pathetic. But, in any case, they were riding high and their books were selling. DAREDEVIL, CRIME DOES NOT PAY — and at the same time I was doing some crime books for **Ed Cronin** over at Hillman. **Ed Cronin** was my favorite editor, he was a character. He was a worrywart. You would bring in your pages and before he read them he would count them three times. *(Laughter.)* But he *lived* his books, he was *dedicated* to them, and he *loved* them. I'd go out to the automat — that was his budget — after work with him, and we'd plot stories. He'd say, "Hey, what if this, what if that! Ooh, hey!!" He'd get all excited, and these drunken derelicts at the next table were looking at us, you know. *(Laughter.)* And Ed, who looked like Caspar Milquetoast, he's acting, he's excited, he's living these exciting stories. He loved them.

Well, they became good sellers. And AIRBOY. So I was sort of in demand then. **Eli Katz** at that time — I can't believe this guy's success — no talent is *personified* in him, in my opinion. I mean that strip he did was typical of his career — the moment something is good, he'll do a takeoff on it. He'd just gotten fired from **Simon & Kirby,** they couldn't take him anymore, and he was an artist who drew like **Simon & Kirby** but not very well. He was not a very likable guy. He was physically not very attractive, he looked like Ichabod Crane, and he was a *whiner!* It was uncomfortable to be around him, and as a result he was not doing very well. I think it was **Mike Roy** who brought him up and introduced him to me, and he started about how great you are, you should be at DC, I'll take you up there, on and on. I was pretty happy, I had all of the work I would want, but he kept insisting I should go up, and he made a call and made an appointment.

He made an appointment! And he came with me! Somebody said, "Is he with you?" *(Laughter.)* I started at DC on the wrong foot, I was a friend of **Eli Katz — Gil Kane.** Anyway, *he* was trying to get in and he took me along as a beard. I interviewed, they gave me some crime stuff. But I *never* really . . . They gave me a goddamned strip called IMPOSSIBLE

must be something about editing comics."

BUT TRUE. This is the kind of filler that you give to a kid that's just breaking in! So they got me, they wanted me, but once I was there they never gave me anything good. They gave me the jobs that **Alex Toth** turned down!

RICK: *You did some war books for Bob Kanigher, didn't you?*

DAN: *No!* You talk about tormenters, he was terrible, *much* worse than **Weisinger.** He would scream with the doors wide open the most *insulting* things I had ever heard. I once walked into his office after **Meskin** came out *shattered,* and I said, "Bob, I'd love to work for you, I haven't had a chance to find out if I'm still as good as I was when I won the PAL boxing championship." *(Laughter.)* "I would just *love* to work for you! Do you have any scripts?" *(Laughter.)* I mean, I *never* saw **Weisinger** do what he did, and he did it to *everyone!*

RICK: *He was loud, Weisinger was subtle. I once saw a fan tell him he didn't like the art on WONDER WOMAN, which at that time was Ross Andru and Mike Esposito. "WHAT DO YOU KNOW? DO YOU KNOW PICASSO? DO YOU KNOW VAN GOGH? YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ART, YOU DON'T KNOW SHIT! (Laughter.)*

DAN: How do these guys keep their jobs? You know, what he turned out wasn't any better than what anybody else turned out. There must be something about editing comics; even sweet old **Julie Schwartz,** I've seen him pull some mean stuff on people.

RICK: *But he's basically a real nice guy.*

DAN: A sweet guy. And he's still there, I can't believe it! I thought he was an old guy then! *(Laughter.)* But, I did something called ALAN LADD COMICS, it sold fairly well — everything I did sold fairly well. But they gave me the jobs nobody wanted. I never worked with Julie. I always wanted to work for Julie. But, you see, there was a certain *type* of artist that worked for Julie, they were all **Frank Robbins** disciples.

RICK: *Gil Kane, Carmine Infantino —*

DAN: Well, **Gil Kane** wasn't in there; he may have come later. Carmine, of course, was the king of that whole group. The class was **Toth. Toth** was crazy. He was sick — I mean, he was sick. **Toth** was a strange guy, thought everybody was garbage. I don't know why but he talked to me, everybody else he growled at. He once offered me a lift, he'd bought a new car, and we were driving in Manhattan — I mean a really crowded Fifth Avenue, pedestrians walking around — and he said, "Boy, look at those goddamn people, I'd like to just drive up on the sidewalk." *(Laughter.)* His mother would come up while he was working there and get into arguments with the editors about how much they were paying him.

GAIL: He didn't have a good Jewish wife, so his mother did it. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: Yeah, his wild Hungarian mother. **Al Williamson** was somewhat the same; his mother did all of his business. When Al and **Frank Frazetta** and I used to work together, his mother would come in every fifteen minutes to see if we needed anything — and she was also seeing if I was exploiting him. *(Laughter.)* And Al and Frank were in competition. When I got back from Europe I didn't know what had happened, and then I opened up LIFE MAGAZINE and I was flabbergasted. I knew Frank had the talent to eventually do something big, but this was *genius,* I couldn't believe it. He developed so *quickly,* it all happened in about eight or ten years.

To be continued in the next COMICS INTERVIEW! Be sure to pick it up and you will learn stuff you never knew about Frank Frazetta — except for you, Frank, if you're reading this. Also, more FLASH GORDON, as well as Europe, movies, DC, Stan Lee, Stan Drake, THE PHANTOM, and more wives!

"The character in TURTLES, Casey Jones —

So, I'm watching the local news and they mention a story about a stuntman in the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES movie. So I watch and I find out that the stuntman lives in Newport News, Virginia, the same as I do.

Well, a house doesn't have to fall on me, nosiree Bob (besides, I haven't done an interview for DAK in ages), so I met Paul at a local auto dealership where he was doing a remote with a local radio station, and asked if he would be interested in chatting for the pages of COMICS INTERVIEW. He quickly agreed, and we set a date to talk.

Arriving at his home, I was greeted by two of the largest house cats I have ever seen. Cats that made Garfield look downright svelte, but, like their master, were a prime demonstration of the term "laid back."

After fulfilling the cats' requirements that they be petted for several minutes, Paul and I settled down for the conversation that follows.

BRIAN TALLEY: *First and foremost, what makes somebody want to go into something where you're going to be throwing yourself off buildings and stuff?*
PAUL BEAHM: I'm real active, I enjoy doing the type of things you have to do in stunts. And the good thing about doing it is when you go through the proper channels you get all of the right training, as opposed to somebody just saying, "Hey, let's do a ten foot fall!" and then end up getting hurt. The people that I've met in the motion picture business that

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played by Elias Koteas — I doubled for him."

PAUL BEAHM

Photo: Alan Markfield

are going to help me out and train me, they have all the proper equipment so everything that we do can be *safe*.

BRIAN: *We were talking before about how it's helped you with your fear of heights.*

PAUL: Yeah, I guess it has. I've jumped from 50 feet, which is something I *never* thought I would have done. Actually, I started from five feet, jumping into mats, and progressed. At 25 feet was when I started falling into the air bag, and then I went up to 50 feet. I do that very seldom. I'm *comfortable* at 30 or 40 feet.

BRIAN: *Well, the higher the gag the more you get paid, right?*

PAUL: It depends on the stunt, every fall has its price because there're so many variables to consider. You don't *just* do a fall, you might have to crash through a window or something, so every fall is a different price. Some people charge by the foot, some people charge just by the jump.

BRIAN: *When you began considering this did you look at films and study the work of other stunt men?*

PAUL: Yeah. I've always watched the stunts in a movie, it's always amazed me how they do certain stunts, and once I got involved in stunt work it got *worse*. My wife goes crazy, I'm always rewinding whenever I see a stunt. I like to watch the **Chuck Norris** movies, the RAMBO movies —

BRIAN: *What about the BOND stuff?*

PAUL: Yeah, that's got good stuff. Also **Steven Segal**, he's got *great* fighting. That's probably my favorite fighter, he's got the best screen presence.

BRIAN: *Where do you go to practice your work? You throw a mattress out the window and jump off the balcony?*

PAUL: Absolutely. *(Laughter.)* They have stunt schools. They have one in Los Angeles. Most stunt people, what they do is they find a stunt coordinator in the business and they get the stunt coordinator to basically take them under his wing. You work with him and he teaches you things as you go. You can't really train to flip and roll cars, it's not cost effective, so you kind of learn as you go.

BRIAN: *How difficult is it to break into the field?*

PAUL: Most people think it's a lot easier to get into. It's been two and a half years. People don't realize that; they think you can all of a sudden just do something. **Pat E. Johnson** gave me my big break in the business, but I'd been working a year and a half to get that break. Every weekend I was stunt fighting, every single weekend. I've been preparing, that's why I *got* work. Basic punches aren't that hard to learn, but there's a bunch of other things that go along with it. Once you start getting into all of the different punches and things, there's so many different variables, because you've always got to consider where the camera is. Your fist can be eighteen inches away from a face and you can still sell that punch to the camera because of the depth perception.

BRIAN: *That far?*

PAUL: Yeah. There's certain things that you know you can get by with and certain things that you can't. *That's* what's taken the most time, understanding the angles. In stunt fighting you're always having to reposition yourself.

Casey Jones (Elias Koteas)

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Paul Beahm
Occupation: Sales
Birthplace: Lewiston, Maine
Born: 10 October, 1962
Favorite Food: Pizza
Pet Peeve: Dishonesty

"Michael J. Fox's stunt double makes $200,000 a year."

"I'm a Foot soldier. I had a lot of fight scenes."

Photo: Alan Mahfield

BRIAN: *What kind of movie do you prefer, big time action?*

PAUL: My goal, I'd love to work with **Chuck Norris**, to be in that type of action movie. I'd also like to stunt double for **Lou Diamond Philips.**

BRIAN: *Anybody else?*

PAUL: The character in TURTLES, Casey Jones – played by **Elias Koteas** – I doubled for him in a scene. He's busy, too. He's worked with all the big names, **Gene Hackman, Jeff Bridges,** and right before we did TURTLES he worked on something with **Brooke Shields** that'll come out this summer. And he recently finished a movie with **Paul Hogan**, so the guy is doing a lot of work. He's a very competent actor, he seems to be able to do a little bit of everything. I'd like to double for Elias again if the opportunity presents itself. Other than that I haven't really thought of anybody else, just **Lou Diamond Philips**, that's my goal. Like, I think **Michael J. Fox's** stunt double makes over $200,000 a year, so if you can get to be somebody's stunt double there's an incredible amount of money there.

BRIAN: *Actors have their own personal stunt doubles?*

PAUL: Yeah, a lot of actors do. That would be a goal of anybody's, to be a stunt double for somebody regularly, because the work is so constant. I saw a behind-the-scenes thing on INDIANA JONES and **Ford's** stunt double is *incredibly* close, they look really alike. There's a lot of scenes where they can use the stunt double where normally they wouldn't. I thought two years ago I'd like to double for **Lou Diamond Philips**, and he has been going from movie to movie to movie, he's just incredibly successful right now. They had something, it might have been on ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT, and he said that he did a lot of his stunts, which is incredible.

BRIAN: *Not a lot of name actors really want to take that chance.*

PAUL: No, because if something happens to them then they have to halt production, or at least reroute it. A lot of times it's just not to someone's advantage to do their own stunts. **Richard Dean Anderson** used to do a lot of his own stunts until he got hurt, and now he uses a stunt double a lot more. Just the risk of injury is too great, it's better to use a professional stunt man who's used to that type of thing.

BRIAN: *How'd you get the TURTLES gig?*

PAUL: I got a call from an agent over in Norfolk. Talent Connection, and they had heard about me through a martial artist in Virginia Beach. I was trying to get into the stunt business – I'd only been in one other picture, METAMORPHOSIS. The agent called me up because I – *(Phone interruption)*

BRIAN: *A call by an agent.*

PAUL: I was called by the agent because my mother is Oriental and they were looking for an Oriental person to do a death scene, to get killed. I told her that I wasn't a black belt, which is what they were auditioning – I believe they auditioned 300 black belts. So she told them that I *wasn't* a black belt, but as far as stunt work is concerned I could throw some kicks and *look* like I was a martial artist, so the casting people agreed to let me audition.

BRIAN: *How much martial arts training do you have?*

PAUL: Very little. I had some when I was about thirteen. Through the years, what I *did* learn, I just continued to stretch and do my kicks, and then when I got involved in stunt work I started getting training from different black belts.

BRIAN: *For anybody that's going to see the movie after they read this, where should they look for you?*

"They had laser beams going to the puppeteers' mouths."

PAUL: I'm a Foot soldier. I had a lot of fight scenes. I had one scene where I doubled for Casey Jones and jumped out of the way of the truck. But in all of the scenes I was concealed, so you couldn't pick me out. There were four of us that went through the skylight, and then we crashed throught the windows in April's apartment. And I had a scene where I fell off the fire escape when Casey Jones backed into it with the garbage truck. Those were scenes that I did.

BRIAN: *What goes into the planning, the putting together of a stunt? Do you work from the storyboards or do you just go into something and say, "We're going to have a fight and here's what we'll do," or what?*

PAUL: Everything was storyboarded, so we would choreograph all of the fight scenes. The *major* fight scenes in the movie we choreographed – the stunt coordinator and the different stunt people from Hong Kong started choreographing two weeks before the movie started filming. I was down there, we were just going through all of the motions.

BRIAN: *Like a slow motion step through?*

PAUL: Yes. We just kind of walked through everything, then we picked up the pace, and it eventually got to the pace that you see on the screen.

BRIAN: *Who was the coordinator?*

PAUL: Pat E. Johnson, you got to put the "E." in there. He was the stunt coordinator for the KARATE KID movies, he did THE BIG BRAWL with **Jackie Chan**, he did the fight stunt coordinating for TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A.

BRIAN: *Good movie.*

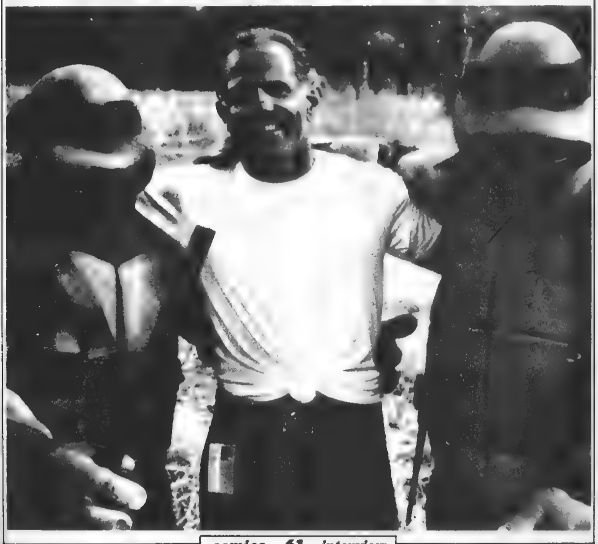
PAUL: Yeah, he's done some really good stuff. He just did an episode of QUANTUM LEAP, as a matter of fact. As far as the stunt coordinators, he's very *reputable* when it comes to stunt fighting, so it was great working with him. He's a biggie.

BRIAN: *Did you get to help with the planning of the stunts on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*

PAUL: Mostly it was the stunt coordinator. They had a fight coordinator come from Hong Kong and he and **Pat E. Johnson** worked together on coordinating the fights. On the second unit I got to do a couple of things. But everything was prettty well choreographed and you just kind of went through the motions.

BRIAN: *They brought a lot of stunt men*

Pat Johnson with Donatello (left) and Raphael (Right)



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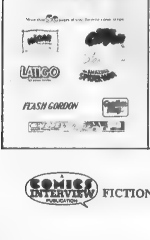

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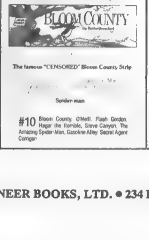

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"Actor Turtles & Stunt Turtles were totally different suits."

over from Hong Kong. Were there communication problems?

PAUL: Initially there were. We had an interpreter the whole time. One of the stunt men had worked with other Americans and he had broken English, and by the end of filming we didn't need an interpreter. **Ernie Reyes, Jr.** and I took the Chinese guys down to an amusement park and they thought that was fantastic. It was their first time in America, so we exposed them to things that they had never seen before, and they just had the best time.

BRIAN: *You ambassador of goodwill, you.*

PAUL: Yes. It was a lot of fun. The hardest thing was we worked together every day for two and a half months, and at night we went out, we all kind of hung out and went out to eat together and everything, and then all of a sudden we disbanded and went back to our homes. That was a little difficult at first

BRIAN: *What was the weirdest thing about working on TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES?*

PAUL: The scenes where they had the Actor Turtles, because everything was computerized. They had laser beams going to the puppeteers' mouths, and you could hear all of the mechanics working. That was hard to get adjusted to because it wasn't just actors.

BRIAN: *Were the Turtles voices done with somebody sitting off to the side to coordinate the movements, or was it just dubbed in later on?*

PAUL: What they did was when we were shooting scenes the Actor Turtles spoke the dialogue, the puppeteers who were making the facial contortions *also* spoke the dialogue – because from what I understand the Turtle mouths moved according to what the puppeteers were saying. Then after the filming was over with they did all of the voice-overs with different voices – I think **Cory Feldman** was Donatello's voice.

BRIAN: *Were you on the set when they first came out in the costumes?*

PAUL: Yeah. Well, I was on the sound stage when the Stunt Turtles put theirs on, and it was *neat*! I was *amazed*! I didn't think they would look as real as they did – they are *very* lifelike. And Splinter was equally as lifelike. The Turtles had somebody in them, Splinter had *nobody* in hm

BRIAN: *That was all robotronics?*

PAUL: Yeah, just all the operators. That was *eerie*, watching Splinter. They were practicing Splinter on the same sound stage where we were choreographing

Photo: Alan Markfield

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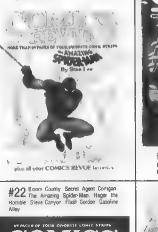

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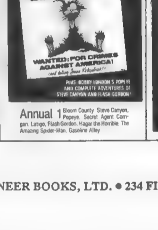

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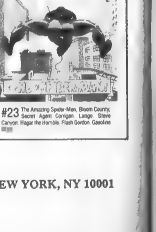

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"To develop the costumes was around $8 million."

Photo: Alan Mayhew

fight scenes, so it was kind of eerie to sit there and watch him, he looked so *real*.

BRIAN: *Now, did the stunt men do all of the work in the Turtle suits?*

PAUL: There were Actor Turtles and Stunt Turtles, they were totally different suits. The Stunt Turtles didn't have computerized faces, they just had the head gear. They used the Stunt Turtles a lot. The suits for the actors were a *lot* heavier. They had the backpacks that weighed 40 pounds and the headgear with all the wires going to it, so they had a lot more limited movement.

BRIAN: *Did you try any of the suits on?*

PAUL: I put one of the hands on and it was really strange. What they did was they flew all of the actors and stunt men that were going to wear the Turtle's costumes to England and made each suit specifically for that person, so you couldn't interchange. It took a long time, like an hour, for them to suit up.

BRIAN: *As opposed to the Foot soldiers —*

PAUL: A couple of minutes. You know, they gave **Jim Henson** the money and they told him what they wanted, and they worked all of the bugs out in the technology, so I would assume in a sequel that they would make the costumes a little easier to work with. They were pleased with what the results were, but I'm sure that there's going to be improvements.

BRIAN: *How much would one of those costumes cost to make, do you know?*

PAUL: The only thing that I heard was that the whole thing to develop the costumes and everything was somewhere around $8 million. That was a *big* chunk of the budget, that was the major part of the budget.

BRIAN: *When you weren't involved in a scene did you just sit back and observe the way everything was done?*

PAUL: On the days that I was there when I was fighting I would watch, but there were a lot of scenes non-action scenes - that I never saw. If I wasn't filming I was probably doing something else.

BRIAN: *What is it like while you're waiting to do a stunt?*

PAUL: You play a lot of cards. *(Laughter.)* I learned a lot of card games when I was down there.

BRIAN: *Does the possibility of death enter the old head?*

PAUL: Yes, it's something that I think about. When you get involved in the stunt business, when you get a stunt coordinator to hire you, he's not going to give you major stunts. He gives that to the people he's been working with who have been in the business and know what they have to do. I worry about it, but the stunts that could kill me I won't get a chance to do right now. I learn as I go, and I pray before every stunt. Every time we did something I was praying. I'm not ready to go yet. Any type of stunt that you do, the people that are setting it up, the coordinators, they have everything down to a science. They know exactly how fast you have to go, they know how far you've got to go, it's like an exact science. It's not like most people think where somebody just jumps through a window or something, it takes a *long* time to prepare.

BRIAN: *On HBO between shows they'll show setups and stuff, how it's done, and it is a lot of work and attention being paid and time being taken.*

PAUL: That's true. There's a *big* misconception, I run into people all the time who tell me that they want to get into the stunt business, it's like, "I'm crazy, I drive cars fast, I'll jump off buildings."

BRIAN: *They watched THE FALL GUY and got some kind of goofy impression as to what it's all about.*

PAUL: Yeah, and that's the biggest problem. People in the stunt business don't want to work with a crazy nut. Everybody is very cautious, everything has to be well prepared and well planned, and you have to really *trust* the people that you're working with. And those are the type of people that shouldn't get in the stunt business. That's the key, getting people to work with that you can trust. Just like on NINJA TURTLES, they took so much time preparing for everything and it didn't matter how long it took, they wanted to make sure everything was right. They were very safety conscious. That was good because my adrenaline was going but I didn't have fear that something would go wrong, I had that confidence.

BRIAN: *Were there any injuries?*

PAUL: I think there were a couple minor

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"People in this business don't want to work with a nut."

injuries, but everything seemed to go pretty good actually. I thought there would be a *lot* of injures because there was a very limited field of vision on the Turtles, the Stunt Turtles.

BRIAN: *Were there any special problems staging stunts with the guys in the suits?*

PAUL: Yeah. Normally when you do a fight with somebody you work with each other, each person compensates for the other. Working with the Turtles it was a little bit different, you had to compensate for them but they couldn't compensate for you because they had very limited vision. So it took a lot more planning than a normal fight sequence.

BRIAN: *Did it slow the production down?*

PAUL: No. We worked the bugs out in the first couple of weeks before they started shooting, so once the filming began we were already set and prepared. It worked out real well.

BRIAN: *Is it a lot of work not to let the jitters get to you?*

PAUL: That just kind of happens, it doesn't reach its peak until right before you do it. You think everything through and then you just kind of go on with your life, and then when you get ready to do the stunt the jitters come back. So you just spend time talking to all these different people — there's hundreds of people on the crew.

BRIAN: *A lot of note comparing between stunt men?*

PAUL: Yeah. I learned a lot of martial arts while I was down there. It was a lot of fun working with everybody. It's not like most people would think where it's real competitive and they're trying to push you out so they can get in; everybody just kind of works together and there's a camaraderie between all the stunt guys and everybody's willing to help everybody else out.

BRIAN: *The last thing you want is competition when your life is on the line?*

PAUL: Yes. It's certainly not cutthroat, which is good. Once you get into entertainment you realize how many opportunities there are.

BRIAN: *Has your work on TURTLES got you any feelers for other pictures?*

PAUL: Well, the stunt coordinator that I worked with, and the other stunt men. I guess if they like the work that I did, if I did good work, they'll probably call me again.

BRIAN: *You've become somewhat of a local celebrity here, how does that grab you?*

PAUL: Oh, it's kind of fun. The good thing about becoming a local celebrity, I guess, is it's going to give me an opportunity to do things with the community, which is something. If I'm going to be in entertainment I want to work with the community if I have time, and hopefully I'll make enough money in entertainment to where I'll have more spare time. So that's the advantage for me. I don't think it'll get me any more work.

BRIAN: *Since this all came about you've done radio, a TV gig –*

PAUL: Newspaper, and then appearances

BRIAN: *What's a personal appearance like with the kids, and are the parents just as excited as the kids'*

PAUL: Oh, they're excited, even the adults are getting autographs. It's a lot of fun. The *feedback* I've gotten has been incredible, everybody seems to really enjoy the movie. Everybody *I've* talked

Photos: A & E Sparling

"As a stunt man you think about JAMES BOND, Chuck

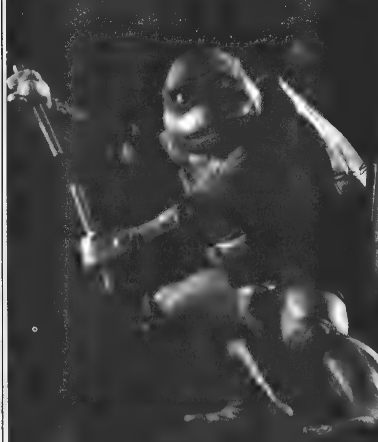


Photo: Alan Mansfield

to just really liked it. They thought it was well put together and that everything was well blended. The kids are *real* receptive. That's the funnest part, talking to the kids – I really enjoy that. It's pretty exciting for them, the Turtlemania is incredible; anything associated with the Turtles is good with the kids.

BRIAN: *I've got here an article from USA TODAY, a lot of people are really upset because of the level of violence in the movie, that it's being promoted as a kids movie and there's too much violence in it. Any thoughts on that?*

PAUL: Well, I knew that that would come up, but it's just like anything else, if there's a little bit of violence there's going to be opposition. That's inevitable. With this particular movie, with the budget the way that it was, they could have put in the blood and guts - the Foot soldiers got killed a thousand times in the movie and there was never one drop of blood! They could have made it a lot gorier, but since there wasn't any blood I think that it was *geared* for the children.

BRIAN: *I read where initially Shredder was going to fall in the garbage compactor and they were going to put in sounds of bones cracking and stuff, but they thought better of it.*

PAUL: Yeah. There was a lot of consideration, I'm sure, as far as the balance factor and the opposition from the people, which is evident in USA TODAY. I went and saw the movie *with* the general public and *everybody* seemed really excited, and the parents were happy. It's the type of movie that a lot of people can take their children to. Like, a lot of Christian people won't take their kids to *any* movies, but they could take them to TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. It's a very *clean* movie.

BRIAN: *The lady says here that a lot of kids, even young kids, don't like Disney, that they're bored with Disney, and that while she was concerned about the violence, at least her kids were entertained.*

PAUL: Yeah. Most kids, if they really like the martial arts aspect of NINJA TURTLES, there are karate schools everywhere and they can get involved in that, can get the proper training.

BRIAN: *In a roundabout way this movie could be good for the martial arts business?*

PAUL: Absolutely. I'm sure that there's going to be a *boost* in membership now. But the thing – all these people saying it promotes violence and stuff – I don't really think so. The Turtles have a lot of *fun*, and it shows that they're well trained.

BRIAN: *Did you read any of the books before you worked on the movie?*

PAUL: Actually, all I did was watch the cartoons. When the agent called me she told me what the movie was, I thought she was kidding. And then I found out about the cartoon and started watching it. I was kind of embarrassed to talk to people about it! *(Laughter.)* You know, as a stunt man if you get a movie you think about JAMES BOND or **Chuck Norris**, you don't think about TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

BRIAN: *"What was your big break in the movies?" "Well, I fought some Turtles!"* (Laughter.)

PAUL: Yes. So I didn't tell a whole lot of people about it at first. But once I got down there and we started filming, public awareness was a lot greater about the Turtles. For some reason in the last year they can't keep the things on the shelves, the merchandising has gone through the roof.

BRIAN: *They've got everything.*

PAUL: All these different sources disagree, they have anywhere from 100 licensees up to 300 licensees, but it's an incredible number. In one publication I read that they receive over 30 requests a day from potential licensees.

BRIAN: *And they only accept maybe one or two out of 100, a lot of them are so crazy. So there is a place for good taste these days?*

PAUL: Absolutely, yes.

BRIAN: *You've also become aware of the comics shops and stuff, done some appearances in comics shops. Any involvement with comic books when you were growing up?*

PAUL: My brother, George, used to collect comic books, but I never got into comics collecting. Just recently I've spent a lot of time in comics stores, and I'm

Norris, not TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES."

amazed at the material that they have, the different things that people collect. It's incredible. It's a huge business.

BRIAN: *What did you think of the TURTLES comics?*

PAUL: It's neat, it's a neat comic book. I like it. Before? was saying, "What's the big deal?" *(Laughter.)* But the Turtles are kind of likeable — I'm just surprised they have so many *products* out. What did I read . . . $350 million a year in *merchandising*, that is incredible!

BRIAN: *Bedsheets, kits —*

PAUL: A parent's nightmare. I tried to buy some Turtles stuff for my nephews at Christmastime and everything was sold out, I couldn't *believe* it. I can't wait to get a copy of the actual movie. I was shocked when I saw it the first time. We were fighting almost every single day for two months, we fought so many scenes that I don't remember all of the ones that I was in — some of them I don't even know if it was me or not. When I saw the movie it was really interesting to see how they pieced all the fight scenes and everything together. It's going to come out on videocassette in September, the ninth month.

BRIAN: *When you do the bits at the shops does the production company furnish you with posters and things to bring along? How does that work?*

PAUL: Well, I've just worked out a deal with one of the licensees, Excalibur Distributors, and they're working with me on getting posters and supplying me with whatever I need. Dell Publishing is also going to work out a situation where I can have books made available to me for the appearances. It's nice if you go somewhere if you have something to give the kids.

BRIAN: *Even a button is nice.*

PAUL: Yeah. Excalibur, I think, has eleven different posters, so there's a lot of variety, which is good. You never know what a child is going to want. So I'm looking forward to continuing to work with them.

(Local newspaper photographer arrives, break for photo session.)

BRIAN: *Is there any kind of gag that you haven't done yet that you'd like to try?*

PAUL: Yeah, I'd like to learn how to do a decelerator fall.

BRIAN: *That's with the cables, right?*

PAUL: The cables, yeah. That's something that I'd like to do. And major car stunts. There's a lot of really good car stunts that I'd like to learn how to do.

BRIAN: *It sounds like a lot of fun. It's work, but it's one of those things where you're getting a rush the whole time you're doing it.*

PAUL: Yeah, it *is* a lot of fun. The shooting schedule is rough, you're working twelve hours a day sometimes, but when you do a stunt and you do it right it's worth all of the time you put into it.

BRIAN: *Was security really heavy-duty while filming was being done?*

PAUL: Absolutely. It was a closed set the whole time we were down in Wilmington, nobody could get out there and see the Turtles — and we couldn't take pictures.

BRIAN: *Was there much excitement in the town?*

PAUL: Yeah, the town was pretty excited. A lot of people didn't really know about it, it seemed like, and then after we'd been there for a month or so people started realizing it and they were kind of excited. They didn't realize that the Turtles were as *big* as they were, apparently.

BRIAN: *A lot of people were thinking in terms of midgets?*

PAUL: They just thought it was going to be "throw together a movie" or something, I guess. I don't know.

BRIAN: *Well, you don't just "throw together" $25.3 million for the opening weekend.* (Laughter.)

PAUL: That's incredible, isn't it!

BRIAN: *That knocked the socks off a lot of folks. That pretty much cements a sequel, I would think.*

PAUL: I hope so.

BRIAN: *If there is a sequel I assume you'll fly on down?*

PAUL: I would hope so. I'm waiting to hear if they're going to do a sequel and use the same stunt coordinator they used on the first one, and if they do I would *like* to get a call to work on it. The only thing I can do is wait.

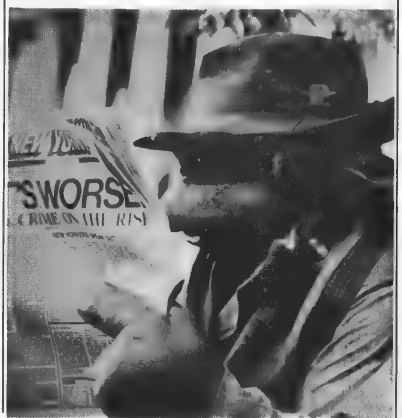
BRIAN: *Now, you told me that they tore the sets down.*

PAUL: Yes.

BRIAN: *If there is a sequel, they're going to have to build them all again. Was there any thought given to just holding onto the sets?*

PAUL: I don't know. It *seems* like it would have been the thing to do. But North Carolina Film Studios has so many different projects going on that as soon as we got done with something they tore it down and started building different sets for another movie. Apparently it's just too much work to keep sets.

BRIAN: *How big a place is that studio down there?*



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"We fought so many scenes I don't remember all I was in."

Photo: Alan Mansfield

PAUL: There's seven sound stages. The studio has 33 acres, and on the 33 acres they have a back lot, and they also have all the different buildings, makeup rooms, a commissary, the production offices, the art department, special effects shops — basically they have everything. They have a *huge* back lot.

BRIAN: *DeLaurentiis owned this beforehand?*

PAUL: Right.

BRIAN: *Did he sell it because all his movies went down the tubes?*

PAUL: I don't really know the history on that. The people in North Carolina were a little bit concerned awhile ago because they didn't know what was going to happen to the studios, but they're doing real well now.

BRIAN: *What other films are they preparing down there, do you know?*

PAUL: TBS is doing a feature down there called THE LOST CAPONE, and 20th Century Fox is doing a movie called SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY . . . I think those are the only two productions they have right now. North Carolina has a lot of movies going on. I just read an article, North Carolina was ranked #3 in generating revenue for films, behind New York and California.

BRIAN: *That's surprising. With everything going on down in Florida with Disney and Universal —*

PAUL: That's true, but North Carolina has a lot of different studios that are *smaller* than North Carolina Film Studios, in Shelby, in Charlotte, and a couple of more that they're building. The good thing about North Carolina is it has a little bit of everything. It's just like Virginia.

BRIAN: *Yeah, you've got the ocean, you've got mountains, you've got your Colonial areas, you've got your cities, so there is a lot to draw from.*

PAUL: Absolutely. Golden Harvest said that they really enjoyed working on the East Coast, and they liked the locations. They have so many different locations. A lot of people in the film business are interested in working on the East Coast, now it's just a question of time for the market to develop. That time will give me the chance to establish myself and get a reputation — everything has its price.

BRIAN: *You've got to wait but good things come to those who do.*

PAUL: That's right. It's good it gives me time to prepare, because there's no such thing as overnight success.

BRIAN: *What did you think when you read that the movie grossed over $25 million in the first weekend?*

PAUL: Naturally, I was excited. It was like a best possible scenario. Everybody that I spoke with, they kept on talking about how well prepared they were for this movie. In November they had the information on this movie to start preparing for their promotions, and basically everybody said New Line did a tremendous job.

BRIAN: *Not a case of overhyping something?*

PAUL: I don't really think so because I didn't see a whole lot of ads on TV. There was a lot of print, but it was like here and there. It came all at the last minute, it seemed to me. So I don't think that it was overhyped. There's a lot of merchandising going on, though.

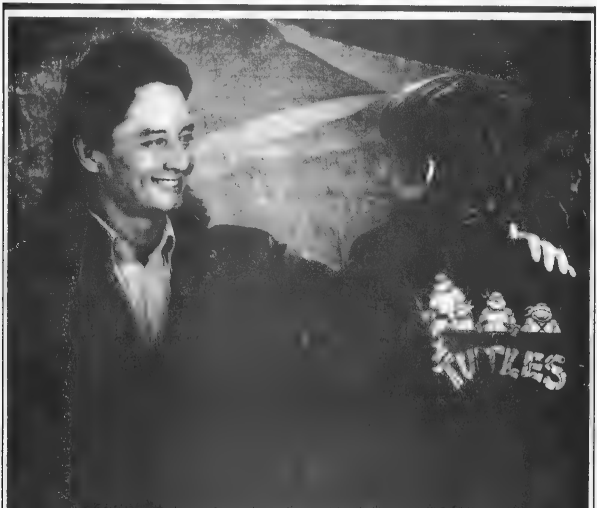
BRIAN: *Of course, that's been going on for the last couple of years*

PAUL: Yeah. I thought that there would be *more* hype before the movie.

BRIAN: *Maybe they didn't think it was necessary because of the cartoon and everything else.*

PAUL: Yeah. They did their homework and whatever formula they used was successful. I know that their goal was to also attract the older market as well as

"A *lot* of people in their 20s and 30s are Turtlenuts."



the kids, and it seems to be working. I've talked to a *lot* of people in their twenties and thirties who are Turtlenuts everybody I've talked to, young and old, liked the movie.

BRIAN: *I'm wondering how long this high on the movie will hold. That was a really big opening weekend.*

PAUL: That's true, that's a good question. I would hope that it continues to be strong, but I don't think it's going to continue to do $25 million every weekend. But I hope that it has a strong, steady following.

BRIAN: *Think it'll get a lot of repeat business?*

PAUL: Based on my conversations with people, yeah. They say they'd like to see it again, and that's nice. Normally I like to see a movie once and that's it, but a lot of people I've talked to have said they want to go see it again. The theater managers that I spoke with were *hoping* this would happen, and were pleasantly surprised when it did. The amount of people was incredible the first weekend, so they had to make a lot of adjustments because they weren't used to that many people at this time. But they had good promotions, and it just worked out for the best.

BRIAN: *What do you do to fill your time between gigs?*

PAUL: Most of the time I do carpentry work. I've tried to get out of that, I've tried to get back into sales, so I'm working with a licensee of the Turtles selling the jackets.

BRIAN: *You're in CBG as a model.*

PAUL: Oh, that was funny. I had six hours to prepare that ad. I got the jackets that morning, I had six hours to do the typesetting and the photographs and everything. It *didn't* turn out like I wanted it to, but I didn't have the time to put into it I would have wanted.

BRIAN: *Marketing the jacket, is this something that they came to you with, or did you go to them?*

PAUL: Actually, what happened was I have a film crew jacket, and I *love* it, and everybody that sees it goes, "I want to get one!" So I called up and asked if they were going to make them available to the public, and she said that she was going to, she had some designs that she was working on —

BRIAN: *Are they going to just be TURTLES jackets or will there be jackets also from other movies and stuff?*

PAUL: She has other movies that she's

"I'm just going to ride the Turtles tide. *(Laughter.)*"

working on now, HOUSE PARTY is one of them. So I'm working on both of those projects. What happened was after I called her and we talked she asked me if I wanted to sell the jackets for her, and I said *sure!*

BRIAN: *Would you be thinking of going into movie marketing full-time?*

PAUL: I've got some people that I've got to talk to in Los Angeles about different jobs. I want to stay in entertainment. Stunt men on the West Coast have real jobs, a lot of them do —

BRIAN: *Bounty hunters!*

PAUL: Yeah. *(Laughter.)* There's probably over 4,000 stunt men and not too many of them do stunt work full-time, everybody pretty much has a job. And with me being on the East Coast and trying to get into the business, this is like my big break.

BRIAN: *They say a great deal of the industry is migrating to the East Coast because of lower labor costs and so on.*

PAUL: That's true.

BRIAN: *It's busting loose in Florida in a big way, and supposedly here in Virginia they're trying to push the industry in.*

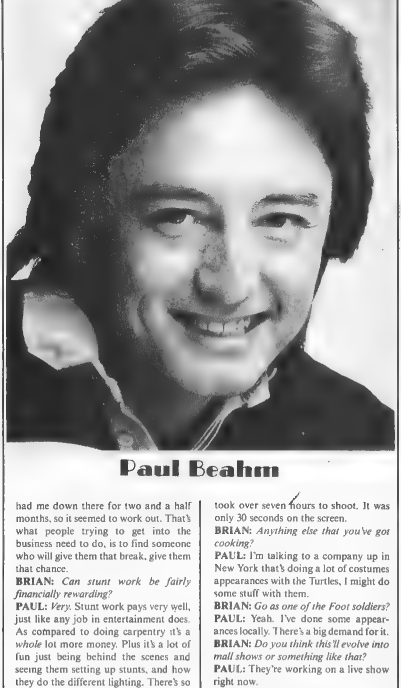
PAUL: Yeah, that's true, the business has started to come out here. The market certainly hasn't fully matured yet, so what I hope to do is develop relationships with people in Los Angeles so that when the market *starts* to mature, when they come out here they *will* call me for stunt work. That's what I'm looking for, is to be established in Virginia. But regardless of how big the business gets on the East Coast, it seems like they're always bringing stunt people from Los Angeles. That's like the hub for stunt men.

BRIAN: *Even though they know there are stunt men here, they prefer to bring in people they are familiar with.*

PAUL: That's true, yes. The stunt coordinator, there's so many . . . when a stunt coordinator is hired to do a show, safety is the biggest consideration and he wants to work with people that he knows can do the job, are competent. So he goes with people that he's worked with.

BRIAN: *And you're in kind of a Catch-22. There's not a ton of work out here for you to get known, but to get more work you've got to be known.*

PAUL: That's true, yeah. When I went down to North Carolina to audition for TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES I spoke with **Pat E. Johnson** and I told him my situation, I said, "Listen, all I really want is a break, just give me a chance." And he did. Instead of working on the movie for a couple of days they had me down there for two and a half months, so it seemed to work out. That's what people trying to get into the business need to do, is to find someone who will give them that break, give them that chance.



Paul Beahm

BRIAN: *Can stunt work be fairly financially rewarding?*

PAUL: *Very.* Stunt work pays very well, just like any job in entertainment does. As compared to doing carpentry it's a *whole* lot more money. Plus it's a lot of fun just being behind the scenes and seeing them setting up stunts, and how they do the different lighting. There's so many different aspects of filming that you get involved in when you just sit there and watch everybody. You realize how much goes into it. There's one scene in NINJA TURTLES where the Shredder comes walking into the warehouse with all the 150 kids, and it looks like a pretty simple scene, but that scene took over seven hours to shoot. It was only 30 seconds on the screen.

BRIAN: *Anything else that you've got cooking?*

PAUL: I'm talking to a company up in New York that's doing a lot of costumes appearances with the Turtles, I might do some stuff with them.

BRIAN: *Go as one of the Foot soldiers?*

PAUL: Yeah. I've done some appearances locally. There's a big demand for it.

BRIAN: *Do you think this'll evolve into mall shows or something like that?*

PAUL: They're working on a live show right now.

BRIAN: *A staged production like SESAME STREET LIVE?*

PAUL: Yeah, that's what I think. They're supposed to go touring all around to different places, so I think that ought to be a lot of fun. That's supposed to start in September, I believe. I'm just going to ride the Turtle tide. *(Laughter.)*

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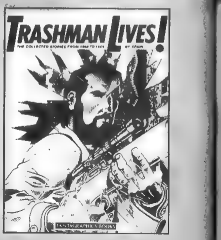

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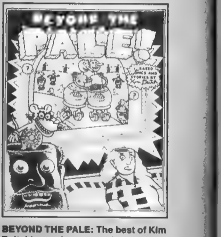

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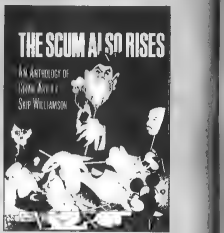

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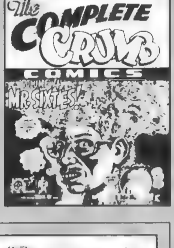

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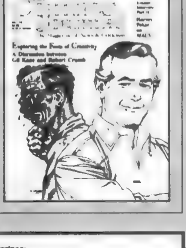

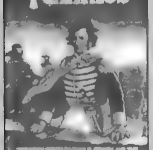

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LAST WORD

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GIVE 'EM THE BYRD

Dear David:

Thanks for the great spread on Wolff, Byrd and me (COMICS INTERVIEW #79)! Here's an update: The CBS/ New World deal fell through — and believe me, I'm *not* complaining. Two pilot scripts were commissioned, and in a word, YAAARGGHH! If that's what they had in mind for WOLFF & BYRD . . . thanks, but no thanks. I'm just lucky the roof caved in over there.

A couple of publishers are interested in a second WOLFF & BYRD collection and no matter *who* publishes it, it will be in a horizontal, two-strips-per-page format. The counselors will repair to Munden's Bar sometime in the future and beginning with its summer issue, POLYHEDRON NEWSZINE, published by TSR, will carry "Wolff & Byrd, Counselors of the Macabre."

Thanks again! I'm looking forward to future issues.

Batton Lash
140 Henry St. Apt. 10
Brooklyn, NY 11201

CHAYKIN & SILVESTRI: "OBSCENE"?

Dear DAK,

First, issue #75:

Gerry Conway. Although I've pretty much had it up to here — that's right, *here* — no, no, not *there*, that's right, *here* — no a little lower — with stuff about the Punisher, I enjoyed the **Conway** interview mainly because **Conway** seems like a nice, intelligent, articulate but unpretentious guy who usually expresses himself in a humorous way. I still recall, and quote, his comment (back in, I think, the Conan issue from the early '80s) about the average female yuppie dressing like a prison matron.

Someday I guess I actually should get around to reading TINTIN, but even though I haven't and haven't read much of the other stuff **Smolderon** discussed, I found the interview pretty interesting, maybe *because* it discussed material that is largely unfamiliar to me.

Howard Chaykin. The best piece in the magazine. Even though **Chaykin** and I come from very different backgrounds and probably disagree on almost everything, I found myself somewhat identifying with him and with his wry comments on being *sui generis* when society expects you to fit neatly into one pigeonhole or another. I guess "the Mikes" will be honked off about his generalization that comic-book people "have no lives, their jobs are meaningless," etc. Reminds me of **William Shatner's** exhortation to the Trekkies, on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: "Get a life! What's wrong with you kids?"

William Stout, part two. As I think I said about part one, I like the guy's art — based on what I've seen in your magazine — but the interview itself was of only middling interest. I would have edited this one with a meat cleaver.

Byron Erickson. Nice little interview, marred only by the fact (given it dealt largely with Disney characters) that there was neither a picture nor a mention of Chip 'n' Dale. All these know-it-alls drone on *ad nauseum* about how great the Uncle Scrooge stuff was, but we real *cognoscenti* are willing to consign it all to the Museum of the Over-rated in favor of the vastly under-rated Chip 'n' Dale (or as they say in France, where the little critters are starting to be revered as much as **Jerry Lewis,** *Les Chipmunques Whackie*).

Joel Thingvall. Boy, what a photo: is this guy intense or what? He looks like he should hang out with **Dieter** from "Sprockets" on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. Liked the interview, though. It had a nice cerebral quality to it, without being pretentious or overly serious. I always enjoy reading interviews where the subject expresses his thoughts clearly and concisely and with interesting turns of phrase, even. I got a kick out of seeing the Marvel **Bullpen** cartoon from the early seventies again; especially that little bit of business with **Jim Shooter** looking over **Roger Slifer's** shoulders.

On to issue #76:

Boaz Yakin. Is that his real name? Or is it a pseudonym, a Biblical pun, masking the identity of a more famous writer not wanting his name connected to the PUNISHER movie? By the time I got to this interview, my reserves of interest in reading about the Punisher had been almost all exhausted, but to my surprise **Mr. Yakin** had a few interesting things to say: e.g., *re* the Punisher's alleged psychosis, he ain't crazy, he's Catholic!

Marc Silvestri. So-so: found myself skimming most of the time. However, I'm sure people who enjoy the more "in-crowd" stuff — where professionals compare their own work to other professionals, discussing various styles and techniques, etc. probably liked this one a lot. So it was good that it was in there: the something-for-everybody approach. Loved the picture of **Silvestri's** sweetie and her cleavage; definitely the highlight of the issue.

William Stout, part three. Whatever I said about part two goes double. But I loved the dinosaur picture on page 51. Next to the cleavage shot in the **Silvestri** interview, this picture was definitely the pictorial highlight of both issues.

Howard Zimmerman. Not of much interest to me: if I had more of an interest in the projects he discussed, I probably would have enjoyed the interview more. I would have liked to have learned more about the man himself: editing STARLOG must have been an interesting experience and I would have liked to have learned something about that, and other aspects of his career. Or maybe not; he and his life could be incredibly boring for all I know.

So, all in all, two okay issues; in fact, on the strength of the **Chaykin** interview, issue #75 was more-than-okay. But reading some of these interviews — I'm not going to go back and check for four-letter-word content, but I believe the following comment applies most to the **Chaykin** and **Silvestri** interviews — I was disappointed in the number of "obscene" words used by your interviewees. I put "obscene" in quotes because it isn't a matter of morals with me, but esthetics. These are bright people: can't they express themselves without sounding like housing-project trash? Why don't they drink malt liquor and play loud rap music on big ghetto blasters, while they're at it?

Them's my comments.

Bill Chadwick
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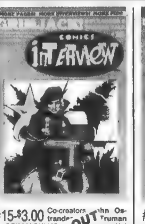

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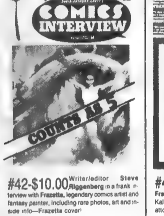

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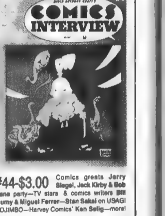

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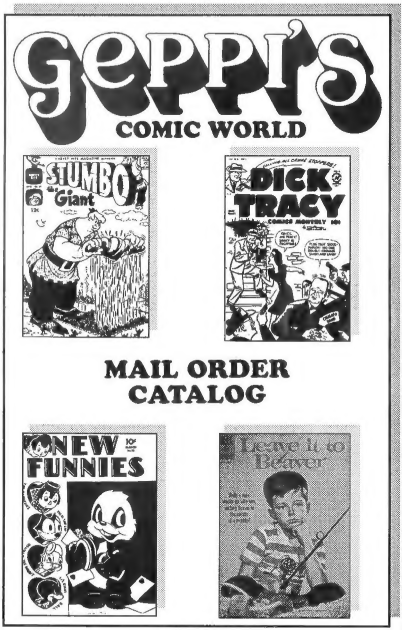

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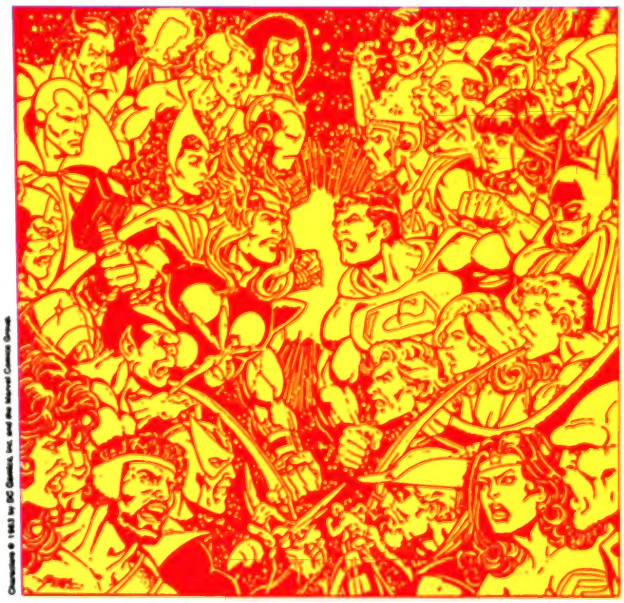

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